THE IMPACT OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION TRAINING UPON WOMEN LEADERS AT RIVER WEST CHURCH

A THESIS-PROJECT

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF

GORDON-CONWELL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

MARY ANN OWENHOUSE NOACK

MAY 2022

Copyright ©2022 by Mary Ann Owenhouse Noack. All Rights Reserved.

To my husband Bob and my sons, Adam, and Spencer.

Your love and support fuel my life.

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

—Ephesians 3:20–21

CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS vii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS viii

ABSTRACT ix

Chapter

1. THE PROBLEM AND SETTING 1
2. SPIRITUAL FORMATION: FOUNDATIONS 28
3. LITERATURE REVIEW 51
4. PROJECT DESIGN 90
5. OUTCOMES AND CONCLUSIONS 145

Appendix

A. COMPARING POSITIONS ON WOMEN IN MINISTRY 164
B. LEADERSHIP WORKSHOP SCHEDULE 166
C. PROJECT PARTICIPANTS 167

D. WORKSHOP #1 SURVEY SAMPLE 171

E. WORKSHOP #1 SURVEY RESULTS.....172

F. WORKSHOP #2 SURVEY SAMPLE 173

G. LECTIO DIVINA HANDOUT 174

H. WORKSHOP #2 SURVEY RESULTS.....175

I. WORKSHOP #3 SURVEY SAMPLE 176

J. WORKSHOP #3 SURVEY RESULTS.....178

K. WORKSHOP #3 SPIRITUAL PRACTICES SCHEDULE 179

L. INTERACTIVE RETREAT PIECES.....181

M. REENTRY WITH GOD ON RETREAT 182

N. WORKSHOP #4 STRENGTHENING THE SOUL FOR LEADERS A.....183

O. WORKSHOP #5 STRENGTHENING THE SOUL FOR LEADERS B.....190

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....194

VITA.....201

ILLUSTRATIONS

Table

1. The River Bible Studies, by Year 17

2. Eight Spiritual Practices of Jesus 118

Figure

1. Weekly Church Attendance, by Age 26

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The women of River West Church comprise an incredible community of Christ-followers who are always eager to learn and grow in spiritual maturity and faith. It is my joy and privilege to serve as their spiritual shepherd. I am especially grateful for the leadership team of The River and their enthusiastic embrace of my project. Thank you for showing up on Saturday mornings with a willing spirit to embrace learning something new about spiritual formation and applying it to your life. You are the reason for this project, and I am so grateful to God for you!

A very special thank you to my editor Sally Auguston who toiled for untold hours on the refinement of this project. Her talent in editing and her personal support were great strengths to me throughout. I am also grateful for my ministry partners, Jenna Gilchrist, Rhonda Birchard and Kathleen Self, who covered all the bases at The River so I could take a study sabbatical for a month and finish writing.

I work with a great team of pastors at River West Church, and I am especially appreciative of Senior Pastor Adam McMurray and his unwavering support of my leadership as well as his friendship and listening ear. I am also thankful for my mentor Stephen Macchia who always challenged me to do my best and cheered me on to the very end.

Most of all, I'm grateful for my husband Bob and my sons, Adam and Spencer, who encouraged me along the way and never doubted that I could bring this project to completion. They are my greatest joy and daily delight.

ABSTRACT

Women leaders at River West Church are influencers for the kingdom of God. They are shepherds in the body of Christ, encouraging women to grow in faith as they study God's Word and apply his truth. The ministry of caring for others in community can be overwhelming if leaders aren't closely abiding in Jesus. This project was designed to help ministry leaders attend to the spiritual formation of their souls through intentional practices that cultivate greater faith and lead to an abundant life in Christ.

CHAPTER ONE

THE PROBLEM AND SETTING

Introduction

When Spiritual Leaders Become Disconnected from Their Savior

We were engaged in a brainstorming meeting about the programming of Sunday's service. A Thai food restaurant in SE Portland was a favorite spot for Pastor Bruce Boria, worship leader Bonnie Knopf, and me to enjoy lunch and discuss creative ways to communicate the "big idea" for the upcoming sermon. Our conversation rabbit-trailed off-topic for a moment as we reflected on the morning news; another well-known pastor had fallen into sexual sin.

"How does a spiritual leader, with such significant ministry impact, take a misstep of this proportion?" I asked. Lately it seemed the news from "Christendom" was more reminiscent of a celebrity rag. There were far too many reports of famous Christian pastors who had been "caught in sin." "It's a Jesus problem," Pastor Bruce answered. "It's what happens when a person takes their eyes off Jesus."

Pastor Bruce's simple remark contained a complexity of truth and raised some important questions: What happens when spiritual leaders disconnect from their Savior? What shifts inside the soul of a person who takes their eyes off Jesus? How does a genuine Christ-follower and ministry servant succumb to self-aggrandizement, self-entitlement, or self-pity? How does the gratification of self-fulfilling desires ever take precedence over ministry calling, marital vows,

and kingdom service? Whether it's sexual sin (Bill Hybels[1], Jimmy Swaggart[2], Ted Haggard[3]), scandal (Aimee Semple McPherson[4]), misuse of money (Jim Bakker[5]), or abuse of power (Bill Gothard[6], Mark Driscoll[7]), great spiritual leaders can make career-ending, life-imploding decisions when they disconnect from their Lord and Savior.

Several years ago, Howard Hendricks conducted a survey with 246 male pastors who had committed sexual sin, and he identified four common traits:[8]

1. Without exception, each pastor had lost the value and practice of daily spiritual disciplines.

2. Every respondent confirmed they had no authentic accountability in their lives, no one who could confront them about the condition of their souls.

3. Eighty percent of those surveyed had invested significant time with the involved person, usually in counseling, long before the relationship turned sexual.

---

1. Bob Smietana, "Bill Hybels Resigns from Willow Creek," *Christianity Today*, April 10, 2018.
2. John Dart, "Swaggart Steps Down After Public Confession: Evangelist Admits Moral 'Sin,' Leaves for Indefinite Period," *Los Angeles Times*, February 22, 1988. https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1988-02-22-mn-29975-story.html.
3. Paul Harris, "Ted Haggard, Mega-church Founder Felled by Sex Scandal, Returns to Pulpit," *The Guardian*, June 5, 2010. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/jun/06/us-gay-scandal-pastor-church
4. Justin Taylor, "On This Day in 1926: The Scandalous Disappearance of Preacher Aimee Semple McPherson," *The Gospel Coalition.org*, May 18, 2017. https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/evangelical-history/on-this-day-in-1926-the-scandalous-disappearance-of-preacher-aimee-semple-mcpherson/.
5. History.com, "Televangelist Jim Bakker is indicted on federal charges," October 4, 1988. https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/jim-bakker-is-indicted-on-federal-charges.
6. Sarah Pulliam Bailey, "Conservative leader Bill Gothard resigns following abuse allegations." *Religion News Service*, March 6, 2014. https://religionnews.com/2014/03/06/conservative-leader-bill-gothard-resigned-following-abuse-allegations/.
7. Sarah Pulliam Bailey, "Mark Driscoll Charged with Abusive Behavior by 21 Former Mars Hill Pastors," *Religion News Service*, August 22, 2014. https://religionnews.com/2014/08/22/mark-driscoll-charged-allegations-21-former-mars-hill-pastors/.
8. Marshall Blalock, "President's Perspective: Persevering over Sexual Sin," *The Courier*, July 11, 2018, https://baptistcourier.com/2018/07/presidents-perspective-persevering-over-sexual-sin/.

4. All of them formerly believed this could "never happen to me."

Hendricks concluded that spiritual disciplines are vital to living in the strength and power of Christ. One hundred percent of those surveyed confessed they had ceased practicing daily spiritual disciplines before they fell into sexual sin.[9] Although Hendricks surveyed only male pastors, one can assume that female parishioners, co-workers, and ministry leaders were complicit in the pastors' "fall from grace."

Every Christ follower, male and female, richly benefits from the daily spiritual practices of abiding in Christ. The writer of Hebrews states, "For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."[10] These disciplines, however, must be taught and modeled by spiritual leaders who actively cultivate patterns of engagement with God in their private lives. This is evidenced by a regularity of life that is firmly established in the Word, prayer, and rhythms of soul reflection, like solitude and sabbath. The church needs leaders who exude a contagious faith and a genuine love for God.

Leadership expert J. Oswald Sanders describes leadership as an honorable ambition. In his book, *Spiritual Leadership,* Sanders enumerates the qualities and responsibilities of the person who seeks to lead others in God's kingdom economy for the glory of Christ. Unfortunately, leaders are in short supply, according to Sanders. The church needs leaders who are authoritative, spiritual, and sacrificial:

> Authoritative, because people desire reliable leaders who know where they are going and are confident of getting there. Spiritual, because without a strong relationship to God,

9. Blalock, "President's Perspective," 2018.
10. Heb 12:11. (All scripture verses are taken from the *English Standard Version* unless otherwise indicated.)

> even the most attractive and competent person cannot lead people to God. Sacrificial, because this trait follows the model of Jesus, who gave Himself for the whole world and who calls us to follow in His steps.[11]

The world has been heavily burdened over these past few years with the onslaught of COVID-19, the tensions arising from racial injustice, and the political or societal unrest. The church's voice has been muffled, in part, by mandated church closures which have prohibited people from gathering for public worship, hearing the preaching of the Word, and receiving the equipping of the saints for gospel ministry. The need for Christ-centered, fully devoted, Holy Spirit-empowered leaders has never been greater.

The Problem: The Church Needs Well-Formed Spiritual Leaders

> "God's first concern is not what the church does, it is what the church is. Being must always precede doing, for what we do will be according to what we are."
>
> —Ray Stedman, Body Life: The Church Comes Alive

Who Is the Church?

The Church is God's "called out" *(ecclesia)* people on the earth. The Saints. A community of Christ-followers who are filled with God's Spirit and called to a life of worship, sanctification, and service. The Church is not merely a place to gather, it's a company of people who have been adopted into God's family as sons and daughters.[12]

11. J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership: Principles of Excellence for Every Believer* (Chicago: Moody, 2007).
12. Eph 1:3–14.

It's not easy, however, to live as a foreigner in a strange world or to belong to an "upside-down" kingdom. Rejecting cultural ideologies and resisting a life of futile activities sets a believer apart from his or her friends, co-workers and neighbors. The reality is that it is difficult to live as a Christ-follower in a post-modern culture.[13]

Scripture affirms that the church is God's gift to his children, as well as a blessing to the world at large. God has graciously appointed leaders to the church with spiritual gifts to lead, teach, and train his people. In Ephesians 4:11–14, Paul explains:

> And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes."[14]

Spiritual maturity matters to God. God desires his people to grow up in faith and to experience a sanctifying change in their souls.

Wayne Grudem speaks of sanctification as "the progressive work of God and man that makes us more and more free from sin and like Christ in our actual lives."[15] Dallas Willard adds that "[Sanctification] comes about through a process of spiritual formation, through which the heart (spirit, will) of the individual and the whole inner life take on the character of Jesus' inner life."[16]

---

13. Lausanne Movement, "*Following Jesus as the Truth: Postmodernity and Challenges of Relativism,"* February 12, 2007. https://lausanne.org/content/lop/following-jesus-as-the-truth-postmodernity-and-challenges-of-relativism-lop-62-b (accessed July 10, 2021).
14. Eph 4:11–14.
15. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994).
16. Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart* (Colorado Springs, CO: Tyndale House, 2012).

Consequently, the church needs leaders who are well developed in spiritual practices, relentlessly abiding in Christ through the ups and downs of their daily lives and experiencing ongoing transformation in their inner being.

What Stifles Spiritual Maturity in the Church?

A recent Barna study investigated why the church is struggling to develop spiritually mature Christ-followers. Although people aspire to grow in their faith, research indicates that most people, including pastors and leaders, don't know what "spiritual maturity" really means. The study showed five significant challenges when it comes to facilitating spiritual growth:[17]

1. Most Christians equate spiritual maturity with following rules.

   Though the respondents did not believe their salvation was based on "good works," 81% felt they needed to try harder to do good works and to follow the rules of the Bible to grow up in their faith.

2. Most churchgoers are not clear what their church expects in terms of spiritual maturity.

   Respondents could not describe what it means to be a "healthy, spiritually mature follower of Jesus."

3. Most Christians offer one-dimensional views of personal spiritual maturity.

   Respondents were unable to offer deeper thought on the notion of "spiritual maturity." Survey responses were simplistic and trite, as if no thought had previously been given to

17. Barna Group. "*Most Churchgoers and Faith Leaders Struggle to Define Spiritual Maturity,"* May 11, 2009. https://www.barna.com/research/many-churchgoers-and-faith-leaders-struggle-to-define-spiritual-maturity/ (accessed July 14, 2020).

the topic. Though interviewers probed for deeper answers, respondents could not elaborate on the meaning. Only 30% mentioned that it had do with a relationship with Jesus.

4. Most pastors struggle with feeling the relevance of articulating a specific set of objectives for spirituality, often favoring activities over attitudes.

   Nine out of ten pastors said that "a lack of spiritual maturity" is the most significant, and perhaps, one of the largest problems facing the nation. A subset of respondents also indicated that spiritual maturity is a problem in their church. Most pastors, however, preferred to evaluate spiritual maturity based on outward activities like church involvement, witnessing, or the practice of spiritual disciplines, rather than on heart attitudes that reflect the fruit of the Spirit.

5. Pastors are surprisingly vague about the biblical references they use to chart spiritual maturity for people.

   Pastors exhibited a lack of clarity in knowing what biblical passages addressed the process of spiritual maturity. They were unable to name specific verses or stories that addressed the topic.

The study concluded that "America has a deep spiritual depth problem because the faith community does not have a robust definition of spiritual goals."[18]

18. Barna Group, "*Most Churchgoers and Faith Leaders Struggle to Define Spiritual Maturity,"* May 11, 2009.

Clearly, the church is not succeeding in helping people "mature . . . to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." Several factors may be at play:

1. The church is not prioritizing spiritual formation as a means for maturation in Christ. Emphasizing outward activities over inward transformation has mistakenly led people to equate "good works" and "rule-following" with spiritual growth.

2. If pastors and church leaders are not clear on the concept and mission of growing their congregants up in faith, it's unlikely that they are developing spiritual practices in their own lives. The busywork of the ministry can rob the best-intentioned pastor of times with the Lord in quiet reflection and prayer.

3. The majority of Christians surveyed identified three barriers to spiritual growth, including lack of personal motivation (32%), competing obligations or distractions (26%), and lack of involvement in activities that nurture growth (19%).[19]

This brings us to the question at the heart of this thesis-project:

What Is the Impact of Spiritual Formation Training on Leaders in the Church?

Recalling Paul's explanation of the body of Christ in Ephesians 4, it seems reasonable to assume the following:

If the mission of the church is to help cultivate spiritual maturity in the body of Christ, and *if* God has given to the church, leaders who are gifted by His Spirit to help equip the saints for the work

19. Barna Group, "*Most Churchgoers and Faith Leaders Struggle to Define Spiritual Maturity,"* May 11, 2009.

of the ministry, *then* those leaders must not only function as models of spiritual maturity, but also teach spiritual practices to others.

Paul wisely counseled in Ephesians 4:14, ". . . so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes."[20] To Paul's point, the spiritual health of the church is at risk when spiritually immature believers aren't equipped to navigate the storms of life.

Clearly, the church needs spiritually mature leaders who can model an authentic life of faith in Christ and disciple others in the practices of spiritual formation.

Ministry Setting: The History of River West Church

In the summer of 1989, Pastor Guy Gray and his wife Maureen left their thriving church in Medford, Oregon and relocated to Portland. Though their small-town church had grown strong under their 10-year leadership, the Grays knew that a bigger city would offer more opportunities for them to raise their family and serve the Lord in ministry.

Coincidentally, another Medford church family had also relocated to Portland, and it wasn't long before Guy and Maureen were gathered in Paul and Melissa James' living room to pray and dream about planting a new church. With the Holy Spirit's guidance, they soon welcomed a small group of people into their home for an inaugural Sunday worship service.

Three months later, the group had outgrown the James' home and needed to find a larger space. The Garden Home Rec Center in Tigard Oregon provided a more spacious facility for

20. Eph 4:14.

gathering, and the church continued to grow. By the first quarter of 1990, "River West Church" was officially established.[22]

"When the church first started, God sent us evangelists," recalled Pastor Guy. "Dave Casebeer was one of the most outgoing evangelistic guys I've ever known in my life . . . he literally brought dozens and dozens of people to the church."[23]

After a few months, the people who ran the Rec Center recognized that they had a conflict in their bylaws regarding a church meeting in their building; River West needed to find a new location. Nearby West Hills Christian School graciously invited the church to use their campus on Sunday mornings, and River West was able to grow in that Portland location for three years.

Several more relocations followed over the next seven years, as various schools opened and closed their doors to the roving church. Each transition placed greater strain on the congregation because temporary facilities required volunteers to set up and tear down equipment every week. Parents also longed for better nursery and childcare accommodations. Young families grew weary and restless from the hardship of meeting in temporary spaces that were not well equipped for children.

"We began to lose momentum when our young families started searching for other churches with better children's ministries. Our church actually began to shrink until we were finally able to buy our own building," Pastor Guy explained.

22. River West Church, http://www.riverwest.org.
23. Guy Gray, interview by author, Lake Oswego, July 13, 2020.

In the summer of 1999, a small church building in a quiet Lake Oswego, Oregon neighborhood called "Greentree" went up for sale. After ten years of serial relocation, River West purchased their first official church building and began to grow as they planted roots in the suburban community. For the next decade, the church continued to flourish in attendees and staff. Eventually, a distressed church in Lake Oswego contacted River West about merging congregations. River West graciously joined with the small church on Quarry Road, and Pastor Guy raced between the two Lake Oswego congregations to preach on Sunday mornings. Sometime later, the "Greentree" location was sold to the Chinese Christian Church, and the proceeds from the sale provided funds to renovate the Quarry Road campus. However, as the church continued to grow, it became obvious that this facility would not be large enough to sustain the trajectory for very long. Alternative locations were investigated, but none answered the need in just the right way.

In 2010, Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Lake Oswego went through a denominational split. River West was able to do a purchase/swap with their congregation. Our Savior's Lutheran Church moved to the Quarry Road facility, and River West moved into the larger Our Savior's facility on Country Club Road. This spacious new worship center spurred another round of growth for River West Church, which now enjoyed a highly visible presence on a prominent thoroughfare.

The Call to River West Church

In the spring of 2003, my husband and I began attending River West Church. As our sons were becoming teenagers, we had wanted to find a church closer to our home, a church that had a strong youth program where they could make Christian friends. Simultaneously, God was

leading my husband and me into new leadership roles with Bible Study Fellowship (BSF).[24] After serving as BSF Discussion Leaders for a couple of years in our respective (men's and women's) classes, we were selected by BSF Headquarters, to replace two outgoing Teaching Leaders in our community. This new responsibility added more than 20 hours a week to our schedules, so it was timely that we had found a new church that was nearer to our home where we could build closer relationships with the men and women of our community.

Following a recommendation from a friend, we visited River West Church and instantly felt that we had found our new worship community. The services offered spirit-filled worship, deep Biblical preaching, and a comfortably sized congregation of about 300 people.

Over the next couple of years, we developed a friendship with Pastor Guy Gray and his wife. We shared a natural affinity with them because of our similar callings to teach God's Word to men and women in our community. Our friendship provided a safe place for us to share the joys and struggles of ministry.

At the time, the ministry of God's Word was flourishing in our suburban Portland community. Our BSF classes continued to grow until there were nearly 1,200 people collectively attending our two classes every week. River West Church was also growing vigorously in its new location and soon reached a similar number in Sunday Service attendance. This was astounding growth for Oregon, a state that is ranked as one of the least religious states in the nation with only 48% of adults identifying with any religious affiliation.[25]

24. Bible Study Fellowship, https://www.bsfinternational.org/.
25. World Population Review, "Least Religious States 2021," July 10, 2021. https://worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/least-religious-states (accessed July 10, 2021).

One night, during a dinner conversation with the Grays, Pastor Guy shared his concern about some of the women in the church who were voicing their desire for a "women's ministry." "We don't do women's ministry," he said. "We don't do men's ministry, and we don't do women's ministry—we just do ministry."

His views on the structure of church ministry seemed to be more readily accepted when the church was small, and relationships were easier to cultivate. However, as the church was growing, it became more difficult for the women of the congregation to get to know each other. There wasn't enough time between Sunday morning services for friendships to develop, and the women desired more opportunities for organized Bible studies, retreats, events, and community service projects.

A growing agitation was developing between Pastor Guy and a small group of women who wanted a female leader to represent their views and to build an infrastructure of ministry for women in the church. On one occasion I was invited to attend a "prayer meeting" that quickly turned into an aggressive interrogation of the pastor and his views on women's ministry. What Pastor Guy revealed in a subsequent interview was that he was concerned for the health of the church if the right person did not become available to lead this ministry. In his former church, a strong minded, spiritually immature woman had volunteered to lead their women's ministry and had made a "terrible mess of everything."[26]

As tensions began to rise, Pastor Guy felt he could no longer hardline his position on "women's ministry." On one occasion, during a couple's dinner with our respective spouses,

26. Guy Gray, interview by author, Lake Oswego, July 13, 2020.

Pastor Guy acknowledged, “There is only one person I could trust with this role, Mary Ann, and that’s you!”

Meanwhile, God was providentially preparing the path for my transition from BSF to the pastoral staff at River West Church. In 2009, while I was still a Teaching Leader in BSF, God led me to attend Western Seminary[27] in pursuit of a master’s degree in Biblical and Theological Studies. Pastor Guy had also graduated from Western, and two associate pastors from River West were fellow classmates of mine. And so, in the summer of 2013, I resigned my position with BSF and officially joined the River West staff as the first Pastor to Women. The two associate pastors at River West and I graduated together from Western Seminary in the spring of 2016.

The Transition to Leadership at River West Church

My transition into this new role was fraught with tension. The women who had championed so hard for a Women’s Pastor also had strong ideas about what they wanted and how they wanted it done. They were surprisingly quick to criticize how I developed ministries and functioned in my new role.

Against this backdrop, Pastor Guy was wary of the various kinds of power plays that women can wield in a church. He was concerned that if the women at River West developed a community that was too close, they might rise up and try to overrun his ministry. He’d heard horror stories from other ministry leaders about women who ran senior pastors out of their

27. Western Seminary, https://www.westernseminary.edu/ July 10, 2021.

churches. He made it very clear that he would shut down any ministry that became a threat to the overall health of the church.

The Paradigm Shift for Women's Ministry

A "paradigm shift" is an important change that happens when the usual way of thinking about or doing something is replaced by a new and different way.[28]

By God's grace, I stepped into my new role as the Pastor to Women with a determination to create a paradigm shift in the way women viewed their identity in Christ, their value in the community, and their relationship with church leadership.

With God's help, I set out to create a community of women in the church who were the "fragrant aroma of Christ,"[29] enhancing the overall ministry of the church, not threatening leadership, nor thirsting for power as some feared.

My training and experience in BSF had taught me how to cultivate a team of spiritual leaders and disciple them in the Word of God. I hoped that bringing women together midweek for an inductive Bible Study that included worship, live teaching, small group discussion, and prayer, would focus their hearts on the person of Jesus Christ and draw them together in genuine gospel friendship.

"The River" was officially launched in the fall of 2012.[30] It consisted of a Tuesday morning Bible Study class with an associated children's program for kids under 5 years old, as

28. National Public Radio, "What Is a Paradigm Shift, Anyway?" July 18, 2016. https://www.npr.org/sections/13.7/2016/07/18/486487713/what-is-a-paradigm-shift-anyway (accessed July 10, 2021).
29. 2 Cor 2:15.
30. River West Church, "The River Women's Bible Study," Last modified July 10, 2021. https://riverwest.org/theriver/.

well as a Tuesday evening Bible Study class which started the following year. Approximately 250 women attended the first study, along with 80 young children. The format included worship, live teaching, discussion, and prayer. The River was effective not only in drawing women deep into the scriptures, but also fostered authentic multi-generational friendships within small groups.

The River leaders also gathered for training each week before class began. Together, we shared insights from our personal study of the lessons and prayed for the women who would be attending that day. Our leaders' meetings became sacred places of spiritual encouragement and provided an opportunity for leadership training and equipping for shepherding and discipleship.

Once a month, all the morning River leaders, evening River leaders and Children's leaders gathered on a Saturday for leadership training seminars. During these sessions, I taught various skills that pertained to their roles as spiritual leaders, including:

1. How to Cultivate a Vibrant Group Discussion
2. How to Navigate Challenging Group Members
3. How to Lead Your Group in Prayer
4. How to Shepherd a Woman Who Is in Pain
5. How to Share the Gospel
6. How to Lead in the Power of the Holy Spirit
7. How to Create Margins for Ministry
8. How to Develop the Heart of a Leader

9. How to Shepherd Intergenerational Groups

For ten years, The River continued to thrive both in numbers and in spiritual maturity. Together, we studied a wide array of scripture, as shown in the table 1.

Table 1. River Bible Studies, by Year

YEAR	BIBLE STUDY
2012	John
2013	Romans
2014	The Life of David (1 & 2 Samuel)
2015	The Life of Jesus (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John)
2016	The Attributes of God
2017	Ephesians
2018	The Pentateuch
2019	James and 1 & 2 Peter
2020	Psalms
2021	Acts of the Apostles

Dramatic change has occurred in the culture of the church over this span of time. The women grew strong in their love for one another and in their affection for the community at large. They formed deep friendships and authentically shared the stories of their lives through

prayer. They became more expressive in worship and more responsive to the teaching of the Word by applying God's truth and wisdom to their daily lives.

The infrastructure of The River has provided a forum for shepherding and training leaders. It is a model that is envied by other ministries within River West Church. The strength of the community of women at River West has driven the overall growth of the church and raised up many women to serve in other capacities within the greater body. Over the years, The River has attracted women from other churches, along with those who don't yet identify with a home church and are merely interested in learning more about the Bible. Truly, a "paradigm shift" has taken place at River West Church.

What Is the Problem?

The problem comes with growth. While growth is often a measure of success in a church, it can also fuel exhaustion in overtaxed leaders. In 2019, more than 500 women attended The River with an additional 70 children in The Creek (children's program). This generated additional strain on the leaders due to larger group sizes that made it difficult for leaders to get to know everyone in their groups. It was much harder for leaders to effectively shepherd groups of 18–20 people than it was when group sizes were between 12–15. Some group members may have slipped away unnoticed. Others may have never felt known or safe enough to open up about their challenges.

Larger discussion circles also made it difficult to hear group members share their thoughts about the lesson. This made it more challenging to foster and enjoy a dynamic discussion. Some leaders felt taxed midweek trying to pray for so many group members and initiate meaningful connections via text, email, phone, or one-on-one get-togethers. A

commitment to leadership now required a greater investment of time, training, and preparation each week. Though the training meetings provided the needed tools for leading their large groups, what was happening to their souls as they struggled to encourage and shepherd so many women? Were they still connecting with Jesus?

Ruth Haley Barton warns that leaders can get so caught up in helping everyone else enjoy Jesus that they lack enjoyment of Him in their own lives.[31] There is an inherent danger in a ministry that grows so large and so highly systematic that it begins to run like a machine . . . the soul of the leader can wither from within.

My soul was withering. "I have no time to be human," I told my spiritual director through a pool of tears. "My life is poured out for everyone else, and I have no time to enjoy the simple, mundane activities of life anymore . . . I feel trapped!"

Ironically, my prayer times with the Lord had never been stronger. My husband and I were faithfully meeting to pray together for an hour each morning. These times with God in prayer were anchoring my soul to Christ and renewing my heart each day. God was working in my spiritual life in wonderful ways. However, the weight of ministry and the demands on my time were suffocating me. Was this really the life God had called me to? Was this truly the cost of ministry?

In 2018, God called me to the D.Min. program at Gordon-Conwell to study Spiritual Formation. His guidance was very clear. I knew He was positioning me for deeper spiritual growth and greater ministry impact. And yet, the workload of a doctorate program was also

31. Ruth Haley Barton, *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2018).

increasing the strain on my life. The additional reading and writing assignments in conjunction with a full-time job of ministry (including pastoring, shepherding, and counseling nearly 500 women, plus training and equipping 40 leaders, overseeing 4 other women's ministries and 2 care ministries), along with teaching at Western Seminary, speaking at various conferences and retreats, and being a full-time caregiver for my disabled son. It was all just too much! As the capacity of my ministry was expanding, the quality of my life was contracting. I recognized my own desperate need for time alone with God, to listen, notice, and be still with Him in solitude and silence. I yearned to apply the practices of spiritual formation I was learning about in my doctoral program to renew my own rhythm of life with my Savior.

I also noticed a growing frustration in some of my leaders. Though they had become very adept at facilitating their small group discussions, the fast pace of our culture combined with the busyness of their personal lives seemed to be hindering their enjoyment of Jesus. Leaders often confessed that they were struggling to get their Bible study done on time, neglecting to pray for their women, and were frequently exhausted with the demands that were being placed on their energy and time. Though they remained committed to serve as leaders, they often seemed to be checking spiritual boxes more than flourishing in their roles and in their relationship with God. They appeared to be hungering for a greater inward experience of His presence . . . to be *with* God more while still obeying His call to serve Him in ministry.

The Question

What happens in the soul of a leader who faithfully practices spiritual disciplines and enjoys a deep and abiding relationship with God? How will her time with God refresh her spirit and give her peace as she ministers to hurting people in a broken world? What impact does a

leader's personal faith have on the people who follow in her footsteps? Could it be that her genuine love for Jesus will be contagious to all who know her?

These are the questions I am asking as I embark on this thesis-project. I don't believe that God calls leaders to do more than He will equip them for. However, I believe that His calling on spiritual leaders to serve in the ministry of His church will require a deeper level of abiding in Christ than we have ever known. Like Peter, who started to sink into the Sea of Galilee when he took his eyes off Jesus,[32] I believe God is calling me and my ministry leaders to a supernatural life of dependence that requires us to keep our eyes on our Savior at all times!

Thesis Hypothesis

What Is the Impact of Spiritual Formation Training on Leaders in the Church?

I plan to address this question by examining how the lives of women leaders at River West Church are affected by a series of spiritual formation workshops that are designed to educate them on the art of spiritual practices and encourage them to establish a sacred rhythm of life.

I will examine how the cultivation of spiritual practices in their lives fosters a greater love for God and hastens their growth in spiritual maturity. I am curious to discover if their private spiritual practices will empower them to lead others into greater maturity and faith. I am also curious to observe the impact on the whole church community when women leaders set their hearts and minds on developing a vibrant, mature life in Christ.

32. Matt 14:22–33.

My hypothesis is that training women leaders in the practices of spiritual formation will significantly deepen their relationship with God and empower them to lead others to greater spiritual maturity and faith.

What Is a Well-Formed Spiritual Leader?

Before beginning this project, it has been important to identify the objective. Some might question why developing leaders matters. As we've already discussed, immature leaders who hold positions of influence without being humbly tethered to Christ, can not only cause great damage in the church, but also harm the fame of Christ's name. As Paul reminded us in Ephesians 4:11–14, it matters that we use our spiritual gifts to build up the body of Christ and help the saints grow into fully formed followers. This necessitates leaders who guide the way by personal example. John Maxwell famously said, "We cannot lead anyone farther than we have been ourselves."[33] Consequently, the goal of this project is to facilitate well-formed spiritual leaders at River West Church.

According to J. Oswald Sanders, "There is no such thing as a self-made spiritual leader. He [she] is able to influence others spiritually only because the Spirit is able to work in and through him [her] to a greater degree than in those he [she] leads."[34]

What Characterizes a Well-Formed Spiritual Leader?

A well-formed spiritual leader can be identified by some of the following core values and practices:

33. John C. Maxwell, *Equipping 101* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Leadership, 2004).
34. Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, 12.

1. She enjoys the daily practice of meeting with God in His Word and in prayer.
2. She attends to her own relationship with God before trying to lead others.
3. She knows how to abide in Christ, and the fruit of the Spirit is evident in her life.
4. She is aware that her life can speak volumes about the authenticity of her relationship with God. Therefore, she allows others to see into the reality of her personal faith journey as she models active spiritual growth and perseverance through life's difficulties.
5. She answers God's call to serve him by faith, knowing that the equipping to serve may come after the call.
6. She is keenly aware that *who she is* is more influential that *what she does*. She realizes that contagious faith can be transferred when two lives rub together.
7. She is a lifelong learner who is eager to grow in spiritual faith and maturity, and by her example invites others into the process.
8. She has a well-formed understanding of biblical theology, which anchors her spiritual practices and personal theology to God's truth.

Project Design

I will invite 40 Bible study leaders to be a part of a focus group for one year. These leaders will participate in a series of interactive workshops designed to educate them on the practices of spiritual formation and help them apply what they learn to their personal rhythm of life.

Through this season of intentional shepherding, encouragement, and accountability, I will measure the impact of these trainings on their perceived relationship with God and their ability to lead others in the church.

I will prepare three workshops and one retreat. Each exercise will include a survey instrument to capture pre-existing knowledge about the topic and a post-workshop survey to identify learning and application to the respondent's life.

1. Workshop One: Introduction to Spiritual Formation: The Art of Listening

   This workshop will introduce the theology of spiritual formation and will focus on the art of listening to God and to each other. We will discuss the spiritual practice of "noticing" and "listening" and its application to the role of a spiritual shepherd.

2. Workshop Two: Praying God's Word: Lectio Divina

   This workshop will focus on the ancient practice of Lectio Divina and provide an interactive experience to pray the scriptures.

3. Workshop Three: Spiritual Practices for Leaders

   This workshop will focus on the eight spiritual practices that Jesus enjoyed and show how small daily acts of faith are transformational in the life of a spiritual leader.

These workshops will be followed by one offsite retreat.

4. The Practice of Retreat: (Beach Retreat)

   This retreat will be instrumental in teaching leaders about the spiritual practice of retreat and its impact in the life of a leader. Three sessions will be conducted during this time to

provide experiences of learning, worship, solitude, silence, prayer, and sharing. A focus group will provide insights and feedback from the retreat experience.

Study participants will also read Ruth Haley Barton's book, *Sacred Rhythms,* to encourage them to enjoy Jesus as they serve him in leading others and to further their understanding of the spiritual disciplines.[35]

Conclusion

The church needs women leaders who are deep in theological understanding, mature in dependence upon Christ, and devoted as servants in the ministry, especially in the care of other women in the body of Christ.

A recent article about the State of the Church in 2020, reported that the church is experiencing a steep decline in the numbers of women attending. This is in sharp contrast to previous generations of women who led the way in bringing their husbands and children to church every Sunday. According to Ryan Burge, the author of an article entitled, *"*Behind the Steep Decline in Church Attendance Among Women," "[women] have become more involved in the workplace, [but] their responsibilities at both home and church have not abated. The reality is that society is asking women to do it all, but each day still has the same 24 hours."[36]

This cultural shift is making an impact on church attendance. Until 2009, studies show that 48% of women attended church once a week. That has dropped to 31% in the past 10 years.

35. Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation.* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2006).
36. Barna.com, "Behind the Steep Decline in Church Attendance Among Women," March 4, 2020. https://www.barna.com/changes-behind-the-scenes/, (accessed July 10, 2020).

The graph in figure 1 shows how church attendance has been affected according to gender and age. It is clear that there has been a decline among women of all ages.

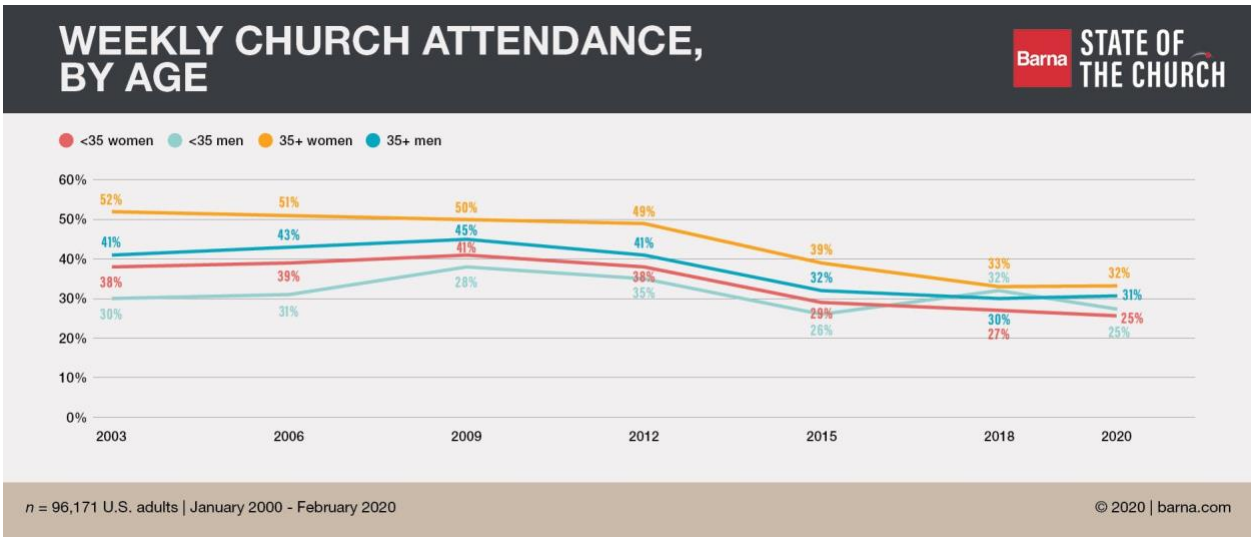


Figure 1. Weekly church attendance, by age.

Traditionally, women have been the active spiritual influencers of their children. What will be the impact on the next generation if women are disconnecting from the church in this generation? Women need to experience relational connection with each other in the body of Christ. They need to be seen, known, loved, prayed for, and listened to. They need a safe place to grow in their faith through the study of God's Word.

Women are influencers in the kingdom of God, and a strong, spiritually mature community of women is like the fragrant aroma of Christ in the church. Their impact is far-reaching. However, it takes well-formed spiritual leaders to lead in the right way. The church needs women who can model an authentic life of faith and boldly disciple others into fully formed followers of Christ.

This thesis-project will study the impact of spiritual formation training on leaders at River West Church and provide tools for others to use in their context of ministry.

In Chapter Two, we'll examine the biblical and theological foundations of spiritual formation. As our cultural pace is accelerating and our biblical literacy is declining, the practices of spiritual formation have become vital for maintaining intimacy with God. In particular, ministry leaders need to establish a spiritual rhythm of life that develops their faith and increases their dependency on Christ, so they can lead others with his wisdom, power and grace. In Chapter Two, we'll seek answers to the following questions:

- How is our current cultural condition affecting the spiritual formation of Christian leaders?
- What hinders the process of spiritual formation?
- How is Christian spiritual formation defined?
- Who is an example of a perfectly formed spiritual person?
- Why is spiritual formation vital for ministry leaders?

I will close with an examination of the life of Jesus and explore eight spiritual practices that Jesus employed. We'll discover that Jesus modeled a spiritual rhythm of life that is foundational for those who lead others in God's kingdom work.

CHAPTER TWO

SPIRITUAL FORMATION: FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

What in the World Is Happening?

We are living in a time of accelerated change. Change is the defining characteristic of the twenty-first century. It has affected the pace of life, and everyone seems to be feeling the impact of our rapidly changing culture. The Information Age (1970s–present) and the birth of technology promised to make human life easier. Instead, life has become more complicated, and with too many data points, people are so overwhelmed, they often cannot discern truth.

The world is as different today from 50 years ago as it was from the time of Christ to 1950. More information has been produced in the last 30 years than in the previous 5,000. Information is now doubling every four years, and more can be known from reading the *New York Times* for one week than a person in the eighteenth century learned in their entire lifetime.[1]

This overload of information is inhibiting the human search for truth and reality. People are inundated with "facts" and saturated with conflicting internet reports as well as a diversity of opinions on every topic imaginable. The bombardment of information is so overwhelming, many people are experiencing depression, fear, and anxiety as a result.

The changing culture is also affecting areas of faith and spiritual formation. More people are questioning whether absolute truth even exists. They are asking, "Is the Bible true?", "Can it

1. Thomas L. Friedman, *The World Is Flat* (Godalming, Surrey: Picador, 2007).

be trusted?", "Is the God of the Bible real?" The recent pandemic has only exacerbated the confusion over "truth" with conspiracy theories circulating on every front.[2]

There is an epidemic of biblical illiteracy today in Christian churches.[3] According to a 2020 LifeWay research report, *The State of American Theology*, this lack of biblical literacy is having an adverse effect on America's understanding of biblical doctrines. For example:

- 64% agree "God accepts worship from all religions."
- 52% agree "Jesus was a great teacher, but he was not God."
- 59% agree "The Holy Spirit is a force but is not a personal being."
- 54% agree "Religious belief is a matter of personal opinion; it is not about objective truth."
- 48% agree "The Bible, like all sacred writings, contains helpful accounts of ancient myths but is not literally true."[4]

In addition, time for solitude and prayer has become fleeting in a high-tech, fast-paced environment. Increasingly, Christians are choosing to stay in the comfort of their homes to watch online church services instead of participating in local worship gatherings. More people are not only isolating from Christian community, but also removing themselves from opportunities to

2. Lotte Pummerer, Robert Böhm, Lau Lilleholt, et al. "Conspiracy Theories and Their Societal Effects During the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Sage Journals*, March 2021. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/19485506211000217.
3. Ed Stetzer, "The Epidemic of Bible Illiteracy in Our Churches," *Lausanne North America*, July 2015. www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2015/july/epidemic-of-bible-in-our-churches.html, (accessed December 29, 2018).
4. LifeWay Research, *The State of American Theology Study: Research Report 2020* (Ligonier Ministries 2020), http://www.lifewayresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Ligonier-State-of-Theology-2020-White-Paper.pdf.

serve others in ministry. This fosters loneliness and limits opportunities for evangelism. Today, more people are admitting that they hunger for human contact to know and be known by others, but too many are overwhelmed with the demands of their busy lives to attend church, join a Bible study, or participate in community group.

How Are Ministry Leaders Affected?

Ministry leaders and pastors are not exempt from the woes of the overwhelming post-modern life. Teaching, shepherding, and leading others is challenging work. Depression and stress have become common experiences for those who serve as pastors and lay leaders.[5]

Unfortunately, many fully devoted Christ-followers have become lackluster in their spiritual practices which are instrumental in cultivating and maintaining a vibrant relationship with God. Ministry leaders are not immune from the seductive lure of the world and the temptation to drift into spiritual slumber.

D.A. Carson explains the implications of spiritual discipline:

> People do not drift toward holiness. Apart from grace-driven effort, people do not gravitate toward godliness, prayer, obedience to Scripture, faith, and delight in the Lord. We drift toward compromise and call it tolerance; we drift toward disobedience and call it freedom; we drift toward superstition and call it faith. We cherish the indiscipline of lost self-control and call it relaxation; we slouch toward prayerlessness and delude ourselves into thinking we have escaped legalism; we slide toward godlessness and convince ourselves we have been liberated.[6]

The practice of spiritual disciplines helps Christians resist the gravitational pull of the flesh toward self-sufficiency and independence from God. Focusing on Jesus enables a person to

5. Stephanie Dyrness Lobdell, "When You're a Pastor Who Suffers from Depression," *Christianity Today*, December 2017. https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2017/december-web-exclusives/when-youre-pastor-suffers-from-depression.html, (accessed December 29, 2018).
6. D.A. Carson, *The Love of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 23.

resist the natural drift toward godlessness by actively pursuing holiness and spiritual maturity instead.

What Hinders Spiritual Formation?

The Bible warns Christians of three powerful forces that seek to derail the pursuit of godliness. They are: the world, the flesh, and the devil.[7]

a. The World

The world doesn't recognize good from evil. In Romans 1:28–32, Paul explains how men and women in the world have exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator:

> And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.[8]

Remaining steadfast in the spiritual disciplines trains the mind to focus on the things of God and recognize the godless folly of the world.

b. The Flesh

While the human spirit may be willing, the flesh is weak and easily tempted to sin. In Matthew 26:41, Jesus warns his disciples saying, "Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit is indeed willing, but the flesh is weak."

7. Eph 2:1–3.
8. Rom 1:28–32.

Consequently, Christians must actively train for godliness. Paul exhorts Timothy in this regard:

1. "Be trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed." (1 Timothy 4:6).
2. "Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness;" (1 Timothy 4:7).
3. ". . . for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come." (1 Timothy 4:8).
4. ". . . but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers." (1 Timothy 4:12b–16).

The Apostle Paul was a man who understood the necessity and power of a Spirit-filled life. Paul's encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus[9] and his glimpse into the third heaven[10] became constant reminders of his desperate need to commune with the Living God.

c. The Devil

There is no passage in the Bible that more explicitly speaks to the power associated with spiritual discipline than Ephesians 6:10–18:

> Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of

9. Acts 9:1–19.
10. 2 Cor 12:1–4.

> evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication.[11]

Through Paul's many sufferings, he relied greatly on the elements of spiritual armor to withstand the opposition that threatened his life. Though largely unseen, the spiritual forces that wage war against believers are real. The human mind is influenced by subtle lies or carefully crafted temptations that are targeted at producing shame for past wounds or inherent weaknesses. Consequently, Paul exhorts believers to fill their minds with God's Word and stand firm on truth.

Responding appropriately to the schemes of the devil becomes easier when people are regularly filling their minds with Scripture, prayer, worship, solitude, service, and fellowship with other believers. Unfortunately, our worldly culture, fleshly passions, and the seductions of the devil join forces against the processes of spiritual growth and maturity in the believer. It is vital therefore, for all Christians (and ministry leaders, in particular) to "train themselves up"[12] in the practices of spiritual formation so they can experience the full enjoyment and enablement of their relationship with the Living God.

11. Eph 6:10–18.
12. 1 Tim 4:8.

Theological Framework

"Spiritual Formation" is experiencing renewed popularity in the twenty-first century. It has become the buzzword in many mainline, evangelical, and Pentecostal/charismatic circles. People are no longer content with the mellow, ritualistic "quiet time" of the 1980s and 1990s. They are seeking a more meaningful, life-changing interaction with God. According to Evan Howard:

> Interest in spirituality has hit mainline Christianity like a flood. Our experience with social justice has led us to see that outer change without inner change has little staying power and often leads to burnout for those devoting themselves to kingdom work. We are ready for a good dose of inner spiritual transformation. We want something capable of empowering authentic social change, something that can make sense in the context of our increasingly pluralist culture.[13]

While seeking a more intimate experience with God is admirable, there are dangers in pursuing a "spiritual experience" apart from the Holy Spirit of God. Ultimately, spiritual formation is about the process of being conformed into the image of Christ. If Christlikeness is not the goal, the process of transforming oneself for the sake of being more "spiritual" will lead to a menagerie of other psychological and religious practices.

One popular retreat and spiritual direction training center in Colorado, for example, offers communal meals, massage, inner healing, evening prayer, in-depth dream work, daily Eucharist, and "mandala explorations." Mandalas are artistic circular designs associated with Carl Jung's universal symbol of the integration of the human person.[14] While many of these practices may

13. Evan Howard, "Three Temptations of Spiritual Formation." *Christianity Today*, December 9, 2002, 46.
14. Howard, "Three Temptations of Spiritual Formation."

assist with self-discovery, they are syncretistic and muddle the aim of true spiritual formation: to be conformed to and united with the person of Jesus Christ.

What Is Christian Spiritual Formation?

Dallas Willard straightforwardly explains spiritual formation as "the Spirit-driven process of forming the inner world of the human self in such a way that it becomes like the inner being of Christ himself."[15] Keith Beasley-Topliffe describes it as "the dynamics of shaping the human spirit toward maturity and consonance . . . while our spirits continue to be formed (or de-formed) throughout our lives . . . God continues to call us into deeper, more consonant relationships with God, our truest self, people, and the world around us."[16] Henri Nouwen states "Spiritual formation is . . . about the movements from the mind to the heart through prayer in its many forms that reunite us with God, each other, and our truest selves."[17]

In the following verses the Apostle Paul describes a process of spiritual change that occurs when a human life is conformed to the image of Christ by the power of God's Spirit:

a. 2 Corinthians 3:17–18: "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."

15. Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2012), 258.
16. Upper Room Books, *The Upper Room Dictionary of Christian Spiritual Formation*, Edited by Keith Beasley-Topliffe (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2003), xii.
17. Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation: Following the Movements of the Spirit* (San Francisco, CA: Harper One, 2015) xv.

b. Galatians 4:19: "... my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!"

c. Romans 8:29: "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers."

d. Romans 12:2: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

Paul affirms that spiritual formation happens by a divine work of God's Spirit, resulting in a discernible transformation of the human heart. This is a process of change that takes place over a person's lifetime. Consequently, "spiritual formation" can best be defined in this way:

"Spiritual formation is the movement of the Holy Spirit upon a responsive human heart, that awakens a person to the activities of God, who is at work to transform believers into the likeness of His Son, Jesus Christ."

The meaning of this statement is better understood by examining each of its component parts:

"Spiritual"

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity and the primary agent of transformation. It is the Spirit who gives life (Job 33:4, John 6:63, 2 Corinthians 3:6). In Greek, the word for Spirit is *pneuma*, which literally means "breath." It is the breath (*ruach* in Hebrew) of God's Spirit that breathed physical life into the first human being (Genesis 2:7), and it is the breath (*pneuma*) of God's Spirit who continues to breathe new "soul" life into every believer.

"Formation"

It is the divine work of the Holy Spirit to "form" believers into the image of Christ (Romans 8:29). Humans are constantly being transformed by the world around them. Influences from family, environment, culture, society, climate, etc. shape a person's thinking, beliefs, attitudes, and desires. The human heart, also known as will or spirit, is the executive center of human life where decisions and choices are made for the whole person.[18] There are external and internal forces at play that influence our daily decisions, ultimately chiseling our character into a unique identity. When the Holy Spirit is at work in a person's heart, the Spirit "re-forms" that person's character into the likeness of Christ.

"Movement of the Holy Spirit"

God the Father has given the Holy Spirit to each person who receives Jesus Christ by faith. The Spirit is called the Helper (John 14:26) because He teaches and assists the believer in knowing God's Word. He also inspires individuals with wisdom, vision, and revelation.[19] "Scripture makes clear that the Holy Spirit is the ground of God within our souls, calling us from the core of our beings as inspiration; as the source of wisdom, vision, revelation; and as the magnificent experience of knowing God's reality."[20]

The Holy Spirit moves in the life of a believer by leading, comforting, strengthening, and reminding about the life and words of Jesus Christ. This movement of God upon the human heart is likened to the scattering of seeds upon the soil (Matthew 13:1–23; Mark 4:1–10; Luke 8:4–15).

18. Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*, 31.
19. Upper Room Books. *The Upper Room Dictionary of Christian Spiritual Formation, 73.*
20. Grace Adolphsen Brame, *Faith, the Yes of the Heart.* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1999).

In the Parable of the Sower,[21] God is the one who sows his seed (Word) upon the heart of a human being, however, it is the condition of the heart's soil that determines whether the seed will sprout, reproduce, and flourish.

"A Responsive Human Heart"

While God is always at work by his Spirit, the human heart is not always responsive to him. The condition of the "heart-soil" must be made ready for his seed to take root. In Luke 8, Jesus describes four kinds of soil that receive a scattering of seed. He then explains how the condition of each soil (i.e., responsiveness of the human heart) influences the process of spiritual formation:

> The Parable of the Sower
>
> And when a great crowd was gathering and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable, "A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it. And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it. And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold." As he said these things, he called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."
>
> The Purpose of the Parables
>
> And when his disciples asked him what this parable meant, he said, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that 'seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.' Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away. And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.[22]

21. Luke 8:4–15.
22. Luke 8:4–15.

Those who intentionally prepare the soil of their hearts to hear the Word of God, in response to the Holy Spirit's divine activity, will be transformed into fruitful and mature Christ-followers. Jesus suggests that the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23) will also become evident in someone who intentionally cultivates his or her heart into good soil. Consequently, the practices of spiritual formation are instrumental in tilling, watering, and fertilizing the soil of the heart so it is most receptive to receiving the Word of God and bearing spiritual fruit in season.

"Awakens a Person to the Activities of God"

According to spiritual formation expert Stephen Macchia, "The essence of spiritual formation is discovering afresh the movement of the Spirit in, through, and around you, simply because God loves you."[23] There is an awakening of the soul that happens when the Holy Spirit is at work in a heart that is attuned to him. This occurs when a person truly hears the Word of God (Luke 8:15) and is enlivened to his presence. The spiritual practices of prayer, solitude, silence, fasting, meditation, Bible study, etc. are influential in waking a sleepy Christian from spiritual slumber and igniting a fire of faithfulness and devotion to God.

"Transform Believers"

Dallas Willard identifies six basic aspects of human life:

1. Thought (images, concepts, judgments, inferences)
2. Feeling (sensation, emotion)
3. Choice (will, decision, character)
4. Body (action, interaction with the physical world)

23. Stephen Macchia, spoken in class at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary to author, May 23, 2018.

5. Social context (personal and structural relations to others)
6. Soul (the factor that integrates all of the above to form one's life)

The Christian life is one in which all of these human essentials are organized around God and are being restored and sustained by him.[24] "Spiritual formation in Christ is the process leading to that ideal end, and its result is love of God with all of the heart, soul, mind and strength, and of the neighbor as oneself. The human self is then fully integrated under God."[25]

God is actively at work to transform all six aspects of a believer's life. This begins at the moment of salvation when an individual agrees with the Word of God and receives Christ as Savior. Instantaneously, God gives the gift of his Spirit to the new believer and welcomes him or her into his eternal family (Ephesians 1:13–14). At conversion, the whole person is reoriented toward God. What follows is a journey of life transformation, as the believer, in cooperation with the Holy Spirit, yields his or her whole self to God in obedience and faith.

This is often referred to as "sanctification." The word "sanctify" comes from the root words "saint" and "holy." To "be sanctified" means to be set apart as saints in Christ by the Holy Spirit. God is continually at work in the process of conforming believers into the likeness of his Son (1 Thessalonians 4:3).

One evidence of this inward transformation is the manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit. In Galatians 5:22–23 Paul explains, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; . . ." These virtues become evident in

24. Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*, 30.
25. Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*, 31.

the attitudes and actions of a person who is being progressively changed into the likeness of Christ.

"Likeness of His Son, Jesus Christ"

In the beginning, God created man in his own likeness (Genesis 1:26–27). At the Fall, sin entered the human race and marred this image (Genesis 3). While sin has corrupted the image of God in man, God is actively at work to restore his likeness in those who are "in Christ." The incarnate Son of God took on the likeness of human flesh (Philippians 2:7) to set people free from the ravages of sin and death, thereby "re-forming" believers into his divine likeness. Romans 8:2–4 explains:

> For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.[26]

The Spirit then renews the mind of the believer and enables a person to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:23–24). This redeeming work is furthered through the practices of spiritual formation.

26. Rom 8:2–4.

Biblical Framework

Who Is the Biblical Model of a Spiritually Formed Person?

Jesus is the premier example of a perfect, spiritually formed person. He is the Son of God (fully God and fully human) who is without sin and wholly filled with the Spirit of God (Matthew 3:16–17). Jesus Christ is the exact representation of the likeness of God in human form.

Jesus declares, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30); "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9); "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise" (John 5:19).

Other Scriptures testify of this truth: "No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known" (John 1:18). "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:15–17). "He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power" (Hebrews 1:3).

Scripture affirms that Jesus is the incarnate Son of God. He is the second person of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He has always existed and was instrumental in the creation of the world (John 1:1–3). It is curious, therefore, why Jesus practiced "spiritual disciplines" during his earthly life. One might assume that he was exempt from such activities since he is the second person of the Godhead.

What Spiritual Practices Did Jesus Employ?

The following are examples of eight spiritual practices that Jesus modeled during his earthly life. These activities flowed naturally from the intimate relationship he shared with his Father. Jesus modeled a pattern of righteous living. His followers learned from his example how to enjoy a more intimate relationship with God as well.

1. **Solitude**

   Jesus often withdrew to desolate places to pray (Luke 5:16). Crowds followed him, seeking answers for their questions, and wanting miracles of healing. Though Jesus was filled with great spiritual power, he found it necessary to repair the source of his strength and refresh his weary Spirit in times of solitude. He regularly arose before dawn to seek times of aloneness (Mark 6:46) and quiet communion with his Father (Mark 1:35).

2. **Prayer**

   Jesus exhibited a life of prayer. Whether alone on a desolate hillside (Luke 5:16), in a garden with close friends (Matthew 26:36), or in the midst of large hungry crowds (Matthew 14:19), Jesus spoke candidly to his Father. Sometimes he spent the entire night praying (Luke 6:12) and often he prayed in anguish with tears (Hebrews 5:7). Jesus conversed with his Father about many kinds of things. For example:

   a. He requested provisions for the needs of others (Luke 22:32).
   b. He asked for strength and power to overcome temptation (Matthew 4:1–17).
   c. He prayed for the will to obey his Father's plans (Matthew 26:39).

d. He sought unity and love for his disciples and for all future believers (John 17:20–26).
e. He prayed for God the Father to be glorified through his life and service (John 17:1–5).
f. He prayed for believers to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16).
g. He taught his followers how to pray in expectation and faith (Luke 11:1–13).

3. Fasting

Immediately following Jesus' baptism (Matthew 3:13), which inaugurated his public ministry, Jesus fasted for 40 days and nights in the wilderness. During this time, he was repeatedly tempted by the devil to thwart God's plans by declaring his own deity prematurely. Fasting from food weakened Jesus' physical body but strengthened his dependence on the Holy Spirit. He successfully resisted the devil and remained victorious over sin, thereby affirming his identity as the Son of God (Matthew 4:3).

4. Word

Jesus knew the Word of God thoroughly. He meditated on the Scriptures and regularly read them out loud in the synagogues (Luke 4:16–19). More significantly, Jesus is the Word of God (John 1:1). By his Word he created the world and all living things (John 1:2–3). By his Word, he revealed the realities and mysteries of the kingdom of heaven (Ephesians 1:3–10). Jesus is the Good News of the Gospel. He is the One who brings salvation to all who believe. And yet, Jesus regularly meditated on the Old Testament scriptures. He valued all that had been written through the Law and the

Prophets and publicly argued with the religious leaders that the scriptures could not be broken (John 10:22–38; Matthew 22:29).

Jesus knew that the scriptures bore witness to his identity as the Messiah (John 5:39). While the Old Testament pointed people toward his coming, Jesus understood that the New Testament would be written as a testimony of his life and ministry. Consequently, he taught his disciples how to read the scriptures in such a way that they would see how everything in the Old Testament pointed to his death and resurrection.[27] Luke reveals this in Luke 24:45–47:

> Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

5. Obedience

Nowhere is Jesus' obedience to the Father more clearly seen than on the cross. Paul describes Jesus' humble submission to the Father in Philippians 2:8: "And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

Jesus' journey to the cross necessitated a personal decision to submit his will in obedience to his Father. In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus agonized in prayer, "Not my

27. Paul Carter, "What Did Jesus Believe About the Bible?" *The Gospel Coalition Canadian Edition.* December 17, 2017. https://ca.thegospelcoalition.org/columns/ad-fontes/jesus-believe-bible/ (accessed December 18, 2018).

will, but yours, be done" (Luke 22:42). He exemplified a life of obedience, trusting that God's plans were the very best (Proverbs 3:5–7).

Surrendering himself to his Father's will was costly. First, he left the throne room of heaven to be born in the likeness of human flesh (Philippians 2:5–7). Then he suffered physical pain and spiritual agony in his death on the cross. Jesus' humble submission however, resulted in God exalting him and giving him a name above every name (Philippians 2:9–11). His obedience was met with the highest reward: all praise and glory to God! The author of Hebrews describes it this way:

> Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him,[28]

6. Spiritual Friendship

Jesus was a friend of tax collectors and sinners (Luke 7:34). He was not exclusive in his friendships with people. However, he had a more intimate relationship with his disciples and an even closer relationship with Peter, James, and John. The latter three were privileged to see his glory at the Mount of Transfiguration. Jesus intentionally developed spiritual friendships with a select group of people, which served to move them closer to the reality of God.[29] This was most evident in the life of Peter who was changed from an impulsive,[30] overconfident,[31] follower to a steadfast, humble, leader and

28. Heb 5:8–9.
29. Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 31.
30. Matt 26:51.
31. Matt 26:33–35.

preacher in the early the church. Consequently, Jesus changed Simon's name to Peter, which means the "rock" (Matthew 16:18). Jesus' friendship with Peter was not only spiritually transforming, but it also served to shape Peter's character and prepare him for his calling to serve God in kingdom work.

7. Evangelism

Jesus had good news to share, and he was eager to proclaim it to people who would listen. He didn't preach from the street corners, but he built strong relationships with individual people and boldly spoke truth to them.[32]

Evangelism is a sincere expression of love for the spiritual wellbeing of another person. This was evident in Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well. Though he was exhausted from his travels (John 4:6), he went out of his way to meet with a woman who had deep needs and a seeking heart. She was an outcast in her community, wounded by failed marriages, and thirsty for truth. Jesus met her in the reality of her brokenness with a message of Good News in John 4:1–42. In John 4:10, Jesus said to the woman, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

Jesus was offering her the gift of eternal life.[33] He boldly revealed his intimate knowledge of her circumstances. He saw the wounds of her heart and shared truth that would bring hope and healing into her life. He loved her more than he cared about her

32. Tim Challies. "What Can We Learn from Jesus about Evangelism?" *Ligonier Ministries.* Ligonier Ministries Inc. March 18, 2009. www.ligonier.org/blog/what-can-we-learn-from-jesus-about-evangelism/ (accessed December 28, 2018).
33. John 4:14.

reaction to his words or the criticism of his disciples (John 4:27). He modeled boldness and selflessness as he offered her the only gift that would satisfy the deepest longing of her soul. Later Jesus commissioned his disciples to do likewise by going out into the world and sharing the gospel with the nations.

> And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."[34]

8. Serving

The washing of the disciples' feet is one of the most touching scenes of love, humility, and service in Jesus' ministry (John 13:1–5). Jesus modeled a life that was dedicated to serving people, even those who rejected him. His mission was to serve unto death: "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, to give his life as a ransom for many."[35]

Jesus demonstrated a kind of serving that results in dying to self —a giving up of one's life for the sake of others. His disciples needed to understand that following him would be costly. Sharing the Gospel would invoke persecution, separation from family, physical pain, and even death. Jesus experienced all these types of sufferings in his journey to the cross. Jesus served because of his great love for sinful, lost people who are in desperate need of God's grace. As John 3:16 proclaims, "For God so loved the world,

34. Matt 28:18–20.
35. Mark 10:45.

that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

"The good news [of the Gospel] is that the radical call to Christian discipleship is NOT a call to serve Jesus, but to be served by Jesus as we service others, and to be ransomed by him from death."[36] In other words, Jesus served humanity by laying down his life for all who would believe and receive him as Savior. He models the life that his followers are called to mimic—a life characterized by the spiritual practice of serving others.

Studying Jesus' life in greater depth reveals many more spiritual practices that Jesus employed. He was devoted to his Father's will and delighted in living each day in communicative, surrendered, service to God and others. His life exemplified the spiritual practices that have transformed the hearts of millions of believers throughout the centuries.

Conclusion

Why Is Spiritual Formation Vital for Ministry Leaders?

According to Western Seminary theology professor, Gerry Breshears, "Jesus was a perfectly spirit-empowered human. This means that we should be able to do most of the things that he could do. Instead, we have bought deeply into "naturalism," and our unbelief keeps God from doing things he would like to do by our faith."[37]

36. John Piper, "The Son of Man Came to Serve," *Desiring God.* December 17, 1995. www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-son-of-man-came-to-serve (accessed December 28, 2018).
37. Gerry Breshears, spoken to author in a class at Western Seminary, April 3, 2012.

Ministry leaders in the church play key roles in shepherding, encouraging, and praying for others to grow in spiritual maturity and faith. Most importantly, they are models of Christlikeness to the ones they lead. Leaders, therefore, must be fully awake to the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives. They must intentionally disciple themselves in the areas of spiritual formation to enjoy a vibrant, intimate relationship with God.

As leaders employ spiritual practices, they actively grow in their faith and come alive to what God is doing in their lives. Leaders cannot lead others further then they have personally traveled with God. Therefore, leaders who are fully formed disciples of Jesus Christ will cultivate such a zeal for God, and a love for others, that their faith will become contagious to those they lead.

In Chapter Three, we'll turn to biblical, historical, and contemporary literature to examine the value, practices, and examples of spiritual formation. The following are key questions that will be addressed in the investigation of the literature:

- What spiritual influence have women had in history?
- What challenges exist for contemporary women in leadership?
- Why is spiritual formation vital for spiritual growth and maturity?
- What spiritual practices lead to a well-formed spiritual life?
- How do the practices of spiritual formation shape a leader for greater spiritual influence in the church?

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

"I've never had to lead this church during a time of war," said Pastor Adam McMurray as he reflected on the 2020–2022 global pandemic. "I've only led during times of peace."

McMurray, like many other pastors, was unprepared for the wave of suffering and unrest that hit River West Church in March of 2020 when COVID-19 forced sanctuary doors to close and sent congregants home to watch online sermons. "None of us signed up for this," he continued. "It's like we're in boot camp now, trying to learn how to lead our people through the battle while simultaneously dodging bullets."[1]

Pastor McMurray's struggle was not unique. Many pastors around the country felt crushed under the blow of the pandemic in conjunction with the political divisions that erupted during the U.S. presidential election and the nationwide outrage over racial injustice. Many pastors experienced exhaustion trying to navigate numerous socio-political issues that were fragmenting their congregations, while those same pastors also worked to transition church ministries onto virtual platforms. A recent Barna survey reported that 38% of pastors considered quitting full-time ministry in 2021.[2] Perhaps there has never been a greater need for spiritual leadership.

1. Adam McMurray, conversation with author, Lake Oswego, June 3, 2021.
2. Barna.com, "Year in Review: Barna's Top 10 Releases of 2021," December 22, 2021. https://www.barna.com/research/year-in-review-2021/.

In Chapter One, we examined some of the challenges that ministry leaders have faced as they pursued leading others toward greater spiritual maturity and faith. This becomes increasingly difficult when leaders neglect their own relationship with Jesus. Whenever there is rapid ministry growth, or congregants are experiencing greater spiritual needs, leaders can become overwhelmed and exhausted. In particular, the pandemic has increased isolation, loneliness, illness, and death, requiring many shepherding leaders to carry heavy emotional burdens for the people who are under their spiritual care.

The problem arises when leaders are not actively engaged in the practices of spiritual formation that serve to keep them tethered to Christ. As Paul warned in Ephesians 4:14, the church is at risk when believers aren't equipped to navigate the storms of life.[3] Spiritual development is vital in warding off the three enemies of the soul, which seek to destroy the immature and vulnerable in times of turmoil.

Consequently, the church needs spiritually thriving leaders who can function as role models and teachers to build up the body of Christ. In particular, the church needs women leaders who are deep in theological understanding, mature in dependence upon God, and devoted to serving the needs of other women in their communities.

In Chapter Two, we examined the meaning of *Christian Spiritual Formation*. Many New Testament scriptures describe a process of "sanctifying change" that occurs when a human life is conformed to the image of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. For clarification, we defined spiritual formation as "the movement of the Holy Spirit upon a responsive human heart, that

3. Eph 4:14.

awakens a person to the activities of God, who is at work to transform believers into the likeness of His Son, Jesus Christ."

Jesus is the premier example of a perfect, spiritually formed person. He modeled a pattern of daily living, intentionally creating time and space to commune with his heavenly Father. We reviewed eight spiritual practices that Jesus employed during his earthly life. His example encourages others to enjoy relationship with God through a similar pattern of engagement. Ministry leaders who cultivate an intentional zeal for God will inspire greater devotion and faith in those they lead.

In Chapter Three, we will look at the impact of spiritual formation on influential leaders throughout history. We will review examples of several women who served God faithfully in their generations. We will also explore some of the challenges that confront contemporary women in church leadership roles.

Biblical and historical literature depict many examples of godly men and women who modeled a well-formed spiritual life. We will consider some biblical heroes, as well as some historical role models, who inspire a life of deeper devotion to God. We will also assess contemporary literature from spiritual formation experts who postulate that a rhythm of life with God is vital for spiritual maturity, and we will view how the application of spiritual practices leads to a well-formed life in Christ. The purpose of this chapter is to encapsulate wisdom from biblical, historical, and contemporary literature regarding how the practices of spiritual formation shape leaders for greater spiritual influence in the church.

Women as Spiritual Leaders: A Historical View

Biblical literature chronicles many times when God gave women positions of spiritual influence for his kingdom purposes.

Moses' sister, Miriam (1400 BC), is one of the first women appointed by God to be a spiritual leader over Israel. After God redeemed his people from slavery in Egypt, Miriam was regarded as a prophetess, as well as a worship leader:

> For when the horses of Pharaoh with his chariots and his horsemen went into the sea, the Lord brought back the waters of the sea upon them, but the people of Israel walked on dry ground in the midst of the sea. Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women went out after her with tambourines and dancing. And Miriam sang to them:
>
> > "Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously;
> > the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea."[4]

The prophet Micah describes Miriam as being instrumental in God's redemption of Israel.

> O my people, what have I done to you?
> How have I wearied you? Answer me!
> For I brought you up from the land of Egypt
> and redeemed you from the house of slavery,
> and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.[5]

Biblical literature also regards Deborah (1200–1124 BC) as a woman of keen spiritual prowess. She served God as both a prophetess and a judge over the nation of Israel. She listened to God's Word with a discerning spirit and declared his truth to others. Her godly wisdom attracted people who sought counsel and needed help settling disputes:

> Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time. She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the people of Israel came up to her for judgment.[6]

4. Exod 15:19–21.
5. Mic 6:4.
6. Judg 4:4–5.

Deborah was a person of great spiritual influence in her generation. She was called the "Mother of Israel"[7] because of her maternal leadership over the people. At a time when Israel was discouraged by enemy oppression and experiencing lackluster faith, Deborah inspired them to wake up from their spiritual lethargy and fight for their freedom with confidence in God's divine protection.[8] As a result of her spirit-filled leadership, God gave his people 40 years of peace under her tutelage.[9]

God appointed women as prophetesses in the Old Testament and gave them spiritual wisdom to lead Israel through challenging times. Huldah (640 BC) is another example of a prophetess who shared with Hilkiah, the high priest, and King Josiah's men, a divine warning regarding God's judgment against their sins.[10]

Esther in biblical history (480 BC) is widely known as the woman who was instrumental in saving Israel from genocide.[11] Esther trusted God in the face of perilous circumstances and was willing to perish for the sake of her people if her leadership required the sacrifice of her life:

> "Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish."[12]

Esther listened to God's wisdom, practiced the spiritual disciplines of fasting and prayer, and dared to use her position of influence for God's kingdom purposes.[13] She was willing to

7. Judg 5:7.
8. Judg 4:14–16.
9. Judg 5:31.
10. 2 Kings 22:14–20.
11. Esther 9:1–19.
12. Esther 4:16.
13. Esther 5.

serve God in a dangerous scenario while trusting in God's providential plan.[14] Exemplifying the courage and faith of a spiritual leader, Esther's life story remains a source of hope and inspiration today.

God has continued to anoint women for roles of spiritual leadership in every era of human history. Saint Clare was a woman of tremendous spiritual influence in Assisi, Italy (1194–1253 AD). She was born into a wealthy family but shunned her elite societal privileges when her heart was transformed by her faith in Christ.[15] Clare was just 18 years old when she was inspired by Saint Francis' preaching and devoted her life to serving God.[16] Clare was a woman who "pledge[d] to leave all things to live the poverty of the Gospel and the charity of Jesus."[17] She and Francis partnered in friendship and ministry to serve the poor and to lead others in spiritual faith and maturity. Clare wrote a *Rule of Life* for the "Poor Ladies of San Damiano", a religious order that she founded.[18] An excerpt from *rule* number six reveals a glimpse of her passion for God, her devotion to the poor, her friendship with Francis, and her spiritual influence over those she served:

> When the Blessed Father [Saint Francis] saw that we had no fear of poverty, hard work, suffering, shame, or the contempt of the world, but that, instead, we regarded such things as great delights, moved by compassion he wrote for us a form of life as follows: "Since by divine inspiration you have made yourselves daughters and servants of the most high King, the heavenly Father, and have taken the Holy Spirit as your spouse, choosing to live according to the perfection of the holy Gospel, I resolve and promise for myself and for my brothers always to have the same loving care and special solicitude for you as I have for them."[19]

14. Esther 7:1–6.
15. Carlo Carretto, *I, Francis* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1982), 35.
16. Editors, Biography.com, "Saint Clare of Assisi," Biography.com, April 2014. https://www.biography.com/religious-figure/saint-clare-of-assisi/ (accessed January 1, 2022).
17. Carretto, *I, Francis*, 35.
18. Francis of Assisi, Clare of Assisi, and John Vaughn OFM, trans., *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1982), 209.
19. Francis of Assisi, Clare of Assisi, and John Vaughn OFM, trans., *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works*, 218.

Catherine of Siena (1347–1380 AD) and Julian of Norwich (1342–1416 AD) had a different kind of spiritual impact on the world. Both women were known as Christian mystics. A mystic is a person who has an extraordinary spiritual experience with God. This type of encounter with God reveals something that was previously concealed (a mystery), and the person is inspired to live a contemplative life of faith, sequestered from the frantic pace of society and separated from an attachment to material things.[20]

Catherine of Siena was born the 23rd of 25 children during a time when the Black Plague was sweeping the globe.[21] Within three years (1347–1350 AD), one third of the population of Europe had died. At the age of seven, Catherine experienced a supernatural vision of Jesus along with Peter, Paul, and John. At that moment, she devoted her entire life to serving the Lord. Like Clare, Catherine wanted to help the poor, and she joined with a religious group called the Third Order of Saint Dominic, where she served the underprivileged, sick, and imprisoned in Siena.[22] Though she died at the age of 33, she was a woman of great faith and spiritual influence:

> Catherine of Siena moved in remarkably wide circles for a woman of fourteenth-century Italy. She was a mystic whose plunge into God plunged her deep into the affairs of society, Church, and the souls of all who came under her influence. Her correspondence was prolific (nearly four hundred of her letters are extant), drawing in popes and politicians as well as the closer circle of friends and followers.[23]

20. Justin Taylor, "FAQ on Mysticism and the Christian Life," The Gospel Coalition.org, October 2015. https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/an-faq-on-mysticism-and-the-christian-life/ (accessed January 6, 2022).
21. Editorial Staff, *Christian History* Magazine, Mark Galli, Ted Olsen, and J. I. Packer, *131 Christians Everyone Should Know* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2000).
22. Editorial Staff, *Christian History* Magazine, Mark Galli, Ted Olsen, and J. I. Packer. *131 Christians Everyone Should Know*.
23. Catherine of Siena, Suzanne Noffke, and Giuliana Cavallini, *Catherine of Siena: The Dialogue* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1980), xi.

From a young age, Julian of Norwich had a strong yearning for a divine experience with God. In particular, she asked God for three gifts:[24]

1. An imaginative identification with Christ's sufferings on the cross.
2. A bodily sickness in her youth that would bring her to the verge of death.
3. Three "wounds" of contrition, compassion, and longing for God.

Julian lived in an era when "religious culture was shifting away from the perception that God was a distant warrior who victoriously slayed the devil on the cross to provide salvation for mankind, to an age where Christ's humanity and sacrifice was being understood through the lens of divine love."[25] This shifted the focal point of Christianity to a more compassionate view of Christ's suffering on the cross, which likely accounted for more women becoming "saints" during this period. Women tended to experience greater connection with the emotions of the cross (pain, sacrifice, tears) than their male counterparts who related to the cross in more intellectual or rational terms.[26]

Julian's prayer for a divine experience with God was dramatically answered on May 8, 1373, when she was 30 years old. On that day she became extremely ill and was near death when she had a series of spiritual "shewings" that came in three forms: visual and sensory imagery, words perceived directly from the mind, and supernatural insights that transcended words or sensory perceptions.[27]

24. Julian of Norwich and A.C. Spearing, trans., *Revelations of Divine Love* (London: Penguin, 1998), xii.
25. Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, xv.
26. Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, xv.
27. Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, vii.

Amid her near-death experience, Julian described seeing a crucifix that seemed to come to life. She perceived the details of Jesus' bleeding and passion, and she understood in that moment how all his suffering was because of his divine love.

As soon as she was able, she captured her experience in writing. Interestingly, Julian lived in a time when men wrote most of English literature. It was unusual for a woman to make such a significant literary contribution—especially in the realm of theology and religion. Many women were still uneducated and illiterate.[28]

In her book, she records "divine revelation #68" where she experienced Jesus' assurance that what she envisioned was not a delirium, but rather a perspective on how everyone should view their worldly troubles:

> Of certain knowledge that it was Jesus who showed all this and it was no delirium; and how through all our tribulations we ought to have sure trust that we shall not be overcome! . . . And these words, 'You shall not be overcome' were said very loudly and clearly for security and comfort against all tribulations that may come. He did not say, 'You shall not be tormented, you shall not be troubled, you shall not be grieved.' But he said, 'you shall not be overcome.' God wants us to pay attention to these words and wants our trust to always be sure and strong, in weal and woe; for he loves and is pleased with us, and so he wishes us to love and be pleased with him and put great trust in him, and all shall be well.[29]

Julian was profoundly instrumental in revealing the love of God through Christ and exposing a more maternal side of God's divine nature.[30] Clearly, God worked in unique ways through each of these women to accomplish his kingdom purposes in the specific time and place in which they were planted, and with the spiritual gifts and influence they were afforded.

28. Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, xvi.
29. Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, 154–155.
30. Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, xxi.

Women as Spiritual Leaders: A Contemporary Challenge

The topic of women in Christian leadership is one of the most highly debated and controversial subjects in the twenty-first century. The conversation revolves around this question: *"Are there ministries or offices in the church that are gender-specific?"*[31]

Three predominant views have emerged, each citing scripture to support differing conclusions:[32]

1. Egalitarian position: All ministries of the church are open to all qualified men and women. Gender is not a relevant distinction for excluding a person from any office.

2. Complementarian position (moderate): Women are encouraged to minister in any office or ministry open to any other non-elder, assuming qualifications and appropriate gifting. The office of elder is reserved for men.

3. Hierarchical (traditional) position: The offices of elder and deacon are reserved for men. Women are excluded from any ministry that includes public teaching to the corporate body or the exercising of authority over men. As a pattern, men will be in authority over women and not vice versa.[33]

The role of women in the church is one of the most controversial and sensitive issues within evangelicalism today.[34] The conversation is often sparked into intense debate when "women who must defend their call to pastoral ministry feel their personhood and dignity are

31. Dr. Earl D. Radmacher, "Women's Ministry Roles and Ordination" (presentation, Conservative Baptist Seminaries, Portland, OR, September 8, 2004).
32. See Appendix A for a comparison of positions on women in ministry.
33. Radmacher, "Women's Ministry Roles and Ordination."
34. Linda L. Belleville, Craig L. Bloomberg, Craig S. Keener, and Thomas R. Schreiner, *Two Views on Women in Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 265.

being questioned by those who doubt the validity of their ordination."[35] Men who support the ordination of women are accused of being passive toward the exegetical reasons and overly sympathetic toward the stories women share. "Most women who feel called to ministry have experienced the pain of speaking with men who have told them their desires are unbiblical."[36] Those who view this issue from a hierarchical or traditional perspective understand passages like 1 Timothy 2:12 to forbid women from teaching and exercising authority over men.

Complementarians take a more moderate approach to the subject. Their assessment of biblical literature concludes that while women played important leadership roles in the early church, they were not appointed to positions of eldership. Complementarians look to the Gospels and note that "Jesus encourages and nurtures women in numerous countercultural ways, again with one exception: he does not choose any to form part of his closest circle of twelve apostles."[37] Their conclusion is that male headship is a timeless ordinance, and it applies to the highest level of church leadership. However, gifted, godly women can serve in all the remaining levels of leadership.

Egalitarians challenge the term "complementarianism" as a word that is too broadly used to support gender-based hierarchy in the church and home. It can mean different things to different people in different contexts and is frequently redefined by present day theologians.

Egalitarians define complementarianism as the partnership of men and women, who are divine image bearers, called to work together for God's kingdom purposes. "The purpose of complementarity is to pool the unique resources of each as they work together in a common

35. Belleville, Bloomberg, Keener, and Schreiner, *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, 265.
36. Belleville, Bloomberg, Keener, and Schreiner, *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, 265.
37. Belleville, Bloomberg, Keener, and Schreiner, *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, 181.

endeavor. It is a call for 'all hands-on deck,' each bringing to their common task what is needed for success, contributing what would otherwise be lacking."[38] Complementarians often cite Jesus' Great Commission[39] as an invitation for men and women to work together under Jesus' authority. "This is a radical revaluing of our working relationship within Jesus' Kingdom. Ultimately, it's not about authority versus equality; it's about each one bringing to our common task what we can contribute."[40]

This partnership between men and women is often referred to as a "Blessed Alliance."[41] Beyond the benefits of childbearing and companionship, male and female relationships are meant to be strategic partnerships. "God laid out his game plan in Genesis, and the team he assembled to do the job was male and female . . . Their mission—together—is to rule and subdue the whole earth on his behalf. Men and women together. Our relationships with God and with each other are the load-bearing walls of God's original design."[42]

Many of the most controversial scriptures about women in leadership were written by the Apostle Paul. Contemporary theologians question whether Paul's statements about the head coverings (i.e., subordination) of women in the church have been misinterpreted.[43] Upon closer examination of 1 Corinthians 11:2–16, some theologians believe that Paul's message was intended to correct a theological error in the Corinthian church. Perhaps, Paul's exhortations were directed to an overbearing population of men who had implemented oppressive practices against women in the church. These men may have allowed secular ethics to creep into their

38. Alice Mathews, *Gender Roles and the People of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 236.
39. Matt 28:18.
40. Mathews, *Gender Roles*, 236.
41. Carolyn Custis James, *Half the Church: Recapturing God's Global Vision for Women* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 135.
42. James, *Half the Church: Recapturing God's Global Vision for Women*, 135.
43. Lucy Peppiatt, *Unveiling Paul's Women* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018), 86.

Pauline theology, which distorted their view. Paul's message was therefore a correction to their "masculine culture of dominance, competitiveness, rivalry and divisiveness that was more like the Roman culture of the day . . ."[44] Egalitarians hold to the position that "it's time to stop imagining that the Bible prohibits the appointing of women as apostles, prophets, and teachers. This prohibition cannot be supported by the text, and it cannot be supported by the bigger picture we see in the New Testament."[45]

The purpose of this discussion is not to generate a debate on the topic, but rather to expose the conflicts surrounding women in positions of leadership and reveal why women who are well formed spiritual leaders are vital to the health and welfare of the church.

The Effect of Spiritual Formation: A Historical View

As discussed in Chapter Two, the practices of spiritual formation were modeled by Jesus during his earthly life. Throughout the years, many other devoted men and women have contributed to our understanding about how the spiritual disciplines prove valuable in cultivating intimacy with God and maturity in faith.

Benedict of Nursia (480–547 AD) lived a monastic life practicing solitude, silence, meditation, and prayer. Benedict grew up during a dark time in Italy's history. Although he was born into social privilege, he feared that his faith in God would be overcome by the lures of the world if he didn't escape Rome.[46] For three years, Benedict sequestered himself in a small cave

44. Peppiatt, *Unveiling Paul's Women*, 86.
45. Peppiatt, *Unveiling Paul's Women*, 86.
46. Carmen Acevedo Butcher, *Man of Blessing: A Life of St. Benedict* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete, 2017), 34.

enjoying aloneness with God where he experienced life as a hermit in Subiaco, Italy. During that time, he "'trained to fight against the devil,' building up 'strength in the single combat of the desert.' He became 'self-reliant' and 'ready with God's help to grapple single-handed with the vices of the body and mind'."[47]

Benedict's formative years of solitude with God shaped his understanding of how a small community of Christ-followers could live in harmony as they pursued corporate godliness. His *Rule of Life* became the guiding directive for men and women living in monastic societies, showing them what it looks like "for a whole community of people to live their whole life according to the truth of the Gospel."[48] In his *Rule*, Benedict addressed every kind of practice related to spiritual formation including listening to God, practicing obedience, maintaining humility, reading scripture, praying the hours, singing praise, and unceasing prayer. Benedict understood the importance of spiritual discipline as a means for cultivating a heart for God. In chapter eight he writes:

> During the winter, when the night is long, the community can go to bed early. This makes it easy to get up well before the sun —at 2 a.m. even —to begin praying while it is still dark. By sleeping a little past the middle of the night, the sisters and brothers can get up rested with their evening meal digested. After this vigil, while it is still dark, they can memorize psalms or practice holy reading.[49]

Reflecting on Benedict's *Rule*, "on every page we hear Benedict saying in this same caring, fatherly tone: 'Pay attention. Surrender. Pray. Be kind. Stay humble.'"[50] Benedict had a profound spiritual influence on the world:

> Throughout the Middle Ages, Benedictine communities gave birth to the schools where people learned to imagine a new society within the shell of the old. They

47. Butcher, *Man of Blessing: A Life of St. Benedict,* 6.
48. St. Benedict of Nursia, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *The Rule of Saint Benedict* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete, 2012).
49. Nursia, *The Rule of Saint Benedict,* 32.
50. Butcher, *Man of Blessing: A Life of St. Benedict,* 7.

> were training centers for clergy and scholars; centers for the preservation of ancient manuscripts; havens for the arts; sources for spiritual direction; and houses of hospitality for those in need. These communities became literal schools for the world-to-come. But for Benedict in the sixth century, the *Rule* could only have been an honest attempt to say in the present what a tradition of radical commitment to the gospel offered people who wanted to shape a life together.[51]

Like Benedict, Francis of Assisi (1182–1226 AD) left his privileged Italian family to devote his life to serving Christ. During a time of solitude with God, Jesus appeared to Francis in a vision and commissioned him: "Go repair my house, which, as you can see, is falling into ruin."[52] Francis understood this revelation as a calling from God to renovate the church. First, he began focusing his efforts on restoring the building he had been praying in when he received the vision, then he worked to restore several other ruined churches along the countryside of Assisi.[53]

Francis devoted his life to imitating Christ, and he took on the mantle of poverty as an essential element of his identity with Jesus. He spent many years living a life of simplicity in a small cave. Francis relished solitude with God in nature and believed that creation was the "mirror of God."[54] Francis called all creatures his "brothers and sisters," and even preached to the birds.[55] He founded the Franciscan Order of monks and composed a simple *Rule of Life* that informed their mission: "To follow the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ and to walk in his footsteps."[56] Later, he created a second rule: "To observe the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, living in obedience without anything of our own and in chastity."[57] Francis' devotion to

51. Nursia, *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, vii.
52. Carretto, *I, Francis*, 14.
53. Carretto, *I, Francis*, 53.
54. Brother Ugolino, *The Little Flowers of St. Francis of Assisi* (New York, NY: Heritage, 1958)
55. Ugolino, *The Little Flowers of St. Francis of Assisi* Comma page number.(?)
56. Charles Brady Ignatius and Lawrence Cunningham, "Saint Francis of Assisi," Encyclopedia Britannica, September 2020, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Francis-of-Assisi.
57. Ignatius, "Saint Francis of Assisi."

God has inspired many Christians to live a simpler life, enjoying nature, caring for the poor, and obeying the gospel of Jesus.

In a letter written to a chapter of Franciscan friars, Francis prayed:

> Almighty, eternal, just, and merciful God, grant to us wretches, by your will, to do what we know you wish, and ever to wish what pleases you: in order that, purified in soul, lighted up within and inflamed by the fire of the Holy Spirit, we may follow the footsteps of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and to reach you, Most High, by your grace alone. For you live and reign and are glorified, in perfect Trinity and simple Unity, Almighty God, forever and ever. Amen.[58]

The Effect of Spiritual Formation: A Contemporary View

Faithful men and women have exemplified a spiritually well-formed life, and their testimony continues to inform and inspire Christians today. As Ecclesiastes reminds us, "There is nothing new under the sun."[59] Twenty-first century believers can still glean insights from Christ-followers who have walked this earth before us. The need for Christians to persevere in taking off the patterns of our old selves, and putting on our new selves in Christ, remains the same. As Paul reminds us in Ephesians 4:22–24, "to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."[60] The practices of spiritual formation are effective tools for intentionally pursuing spiritual maturity and hastening our sanctification in Christ.

Unfortunately, the world is in short supply of spiritually deep Christians. Superficiality is the defining mark of our age. People want instant satisfaction, and the COVID era has only

58. Carretto, *I, Francis*, 31.
59. Eccles 1:9.
60. Eph 4:22–24.

increased our ability to get what we need quickly through services like DoorDash, Uber Eats, and Instacart. In the past two years, online ordering has skyrocketed with features like Amazon Prime delivering goods within hours of placing an order. Our insatiable desire for immediate gratification is becoming a spiritual problem for our generation. We are being groomed to desire—and expect—speedy results.

Are Christians still willing to invest the time and effort needed to go deep with God? Are spiritually young believers learning how to incorporate the basics of Bible study, Scripture mediation, and prayer into their daily lives? Has the traditional morning "quiet time" become obsolete? "There is an abysmal ignorance of the most simple and practical aspects of nearly all the classic spiritual disciplines . . . We have only one thing to do, namely, to experience a life of relationship and intimacy with God."[61]

Developing spiritual intimacy with God requires an investment of time and attention to soul-transforming activities. When we bring our heart, mind, and spirit together in communion with God we experience a divine reuniting with God and our truest selves.[62] In Christ, we have been invited into the innermost sanctum of the Godhead to be joined in a community of love. In John 17:21–23, Jesus prayed for believers to experience this unique oneness with God and each other:

> that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

61. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline,* 3.
62. Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation: Following the Movements of The Spirit* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2010).

Those who are in Christ are welcomed into the place of deepest intimacy with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is a privilege that is enjoyed through faith and experienced through communion with God in practices like prayer, sabbath, solitude, silence, mediation, study, and retreat. Living the spiritual life and letting God's presence fill us takes constant prayer. Time and attention are required to move us from our illusion and isolation back to that place in the heart where God continues to form us in the likeness of Christ.[63]

Unfortunately, time is in short supply in our busy world. We often have little margin left for investment in our spiritual development. Perhaps we should think of spiritual discipline as "training in the Spirit."[64] Like a bank building that is constructed around its vault, we would be wise to build the various parts of our lives around Christ. If Jesus really holds the center of gravity in our souls, then shouldn't our thoughts, habits, schedules, and routines orbit around him? The spiritual disciplines are tools to help train and center our lives on Jesus. They are not the end in themselves.[65]

We must remember that our faith is much more than a set of activities, beliefs, or values. It is a way of life that can have different expressions according to a person's tradition, denomination, and theological interpretation. However, we should not mistake sound theology for vibrant spirituality. Theology is an important element in spiritual formation. Theology informs and sustains spirituality through the heartfelt knowledge of divine things. Spirituality, on the other hand, is grounded in the belief that human fulfillment can only be fully achieved through a deepened relationship with God.[66]

---

63. Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation: Following the Movements of The Spirit*, xvii.
64. Brian G. Hedges, *Christ Formed in You* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd, 2010), 31.
65. Hedges, *Christ Formed in You*, 191.
66. Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Spirituality* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999), page 73.

The practices of spiritual formation remind us daily of the good news of the gospel and spur us onward by applying God's wisdom and truth to our ordinary lives. This happens as we allow space and opportunity for the Holy Spirit to "form the inner world of the human self in such a way that it becomes like the inner being of Christ himself."[67] Ultimately, this is a work of God's grace, not of human achievement.

Paul reminds us that it is the divine work of the Holy Spirit to conform us into the image of Christ. Second Corinthians 3:18 declares, "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."[68] This transformation takes place as the people of God engage with him in deliberate activities that cultivate greater faith and maturity. If we are not intentional about our disciplines in the spirit, our growing superficiality will leave us deeply unsatisfied with our lives. The more we become enslaved to speed, instant gratification, and technological distractions, the more we will fall short of God's greater purpose and miss the satisfaction he offers us. Possibly there is a monk like Benedict or Francis living inside of each of us. Are we longing for a slower pace of life with God? Could it be that "deep in our souls, we crave space with God that is defined by silence, stillness and solitude?"[69]

Ultimately, the practice of spiritual formation drives us to the heart of Jesus, the place of greatest enjoyment for the human soul. According to the Westminster catechism—it is what we were made for: "To glorify God and enjoy him forever."[70] The disciplines of spiritual formation

67. Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart* (Colorado Springs, CO: Tyndale House, 2002).
68. 2 Cor 3:18.
69. Villodas, *The Deeply Formed Life*, 8.
70. Conway, Andres, "5 Reasons You Need the Westminster Shorter Catechism," *The Gospel Coalition.* April 25, 2016, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/five-reasons-you-need-the-westminster-shorter-catechism (accessed January 5, 2022).

shift our focus away from the distractions of this world and onto the person of Jesus. The goal is an "obedience or conformity to Christ that arises out of an inner transformation accomplished through purposive interaction with the grace of God in Christ. This inner transformation of the heart leads to an outer change of attitudes and actions, making obedience to Christ one of the essential outcomes of spiritual formation."[71] Jesus made this point when he said in John 14:21 "Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him."[72]

The ultimate objective of the spiritual disciplines is Christlikeness, or godliness. "The spiritual disciplines are the God-given means we are to use in the spirit-filled pursuit of godliness. Godly people are disciplined people. It has always been so."[73] These practices are the means of receiving God's transforming grace. As we seek communion with Christ, we are changed as his grace flows in and through us. The disciplines must become priority for us if we are to become more like Jesus.[74]

One of the best ways to pursue spiritual growth is to form a mentoring relationship with another believer who of greater maturity in the Lord. Women, in particular, can flourish in their spiritual lives when they partner with another woman for accountability in the practice of spiritual disciplines. When a spiritually younger woman is tethered to a more mature believer for a season, she is able to grow firm in her faith and become equipped for ministry. "Mentoring is a discipleship relationship that focuses on the equipping of younger believers for the work of the ministry so that they grow in maturity and unity in the faith with the ultimate goal of glorifying

71. Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 73.
72. John 14:21.
73. Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991).
74. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 60.

God."[75] Maturity in the faith produces stability in the body of Christ so that we're no longer "tossed to and fro by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes."[76] A woman who is strengthened in her faith by another will become firmly rooted in wisdom and eventually be able to stand beside others and help them to grow in godliness as well.[77]

Next, we'll examine three elements of spiritual formation that lead to a well-formed life in Christ: The Word, prayer, and reflection.

The Elements of Spiritual Formation

The Word

The Word of God is our guidebook for living as fallen human beings in relationship with a holy God, amid a world that has been broken by sin and death. Scripture anchors us to God and stabilizes us during tumultuous times when we need a fresh perspective of truth and the purpose of life. The Word of God is also "holy ground." It is the place where we can meet God and be drawn into his presence.[78] Scripture describes God's Word as both "living" and "equipping":

75. Melissa B. Kruger, *Growing Together: Taking Mentorship Beyond Small Talk and Prayer Requests,* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 19.
76. Eph 4:14.
77. Kruger, *Growing Together: Taking Mentorship Beyond Small Talk and Prayer Requests, 23.*
78. Chris Webb, *The Fire of the Word: Meeting God on Holy Ground* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2011).

> For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.[79]

> All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.[80]

Not only is the voice of God discernible through the reading of his Word, but God makes his presence known as we meditate on his precepts. The Bible is unlike any other book in human history. The more we read and study God's Word, the more surprised we are by its depth, insight, consistency, and brilliance.[81] Only God could have written such a revelatory masterpiece. The Bible lifts our gaze upward and calls us to wake up from our spiritual slumber. The Word invites us to walk with God, to know him, to receive his salvation, and to worship him. When ordinary people develop the spiritual discipline of reading the Bible, extraordinary things happen as the Holy Spirit guides them into truth. We might consider the metaphor of eating to encourage us to "taste, chew, savor, swallow, and digest God's word."[82]

The study of God's Word is instrumental in the transformation of our souls.[83] In Romans 12:2, Paul instructs believers to be transformed in their thinking through the renewal of their minds, and he explains how the mind can be renewed in Philippians 4:8: "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely,

79. Heb 4:12.
80. 2 Tim 3:1–17.
81. Eugene H. Peterson, *Eat This Book* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2006).
82. Peterson, *Eat This Book*, 13.
83. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 28.

whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."[84]

The Word of God is the principal source for mind renewal, and the discipline of studying God's Word is the primary means for us to *'think about these things.'* In his kindness, God has not left us to our own devices to struggle with the renewing of our own minds, but he has given us his grace as the means for changing our inner spirit.[85]

Scripture explains how sin originates in the mind. Sinful desires begin with tempting thoughts. James 1:14–15 clarifies, "But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death."

It is in the mind and thought life of a person where true transformation begins. Ideas formed in the mind are image-heavy, and they are linked to powerful emotions that can create strongholds. We must replace these destructive images by filling the mind with Jesus. "We must make a total exchange of our ideas and images for his. To think properly, we must know and dwell upon the Word of God."[86]

There are many forms of scripture reading that can spur heart change and mind renewal. Inductive Bible study is one form of deep contemplation in the Word. This type of study uses the Bible to study the Bible, building context and meaning out of the whole story of Scripture.

84. Phil 4:8.
85. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline, 32.*
86. Willard, *Renovation of the Heart,* 25.

Inductive Bible study students often work on thought-provoking lessons that cultivate a healthy habit of daily Bible reading.

Spiritual reading is another form of Bible mediation that leads to heart change. "The first concern of Bible study is to explicate the meaning of the text and then apply it to life. Spiritual reading, on the other hand, is concerned with the Bible as the Word of God that calls us to God."[87] Spiritual reading is unique in that it "presupposes the Bible as God's Word calling us to make a decisive response and thus trains us in a certain spiritual attitude—openness to God, humble listening, willingness to obey . . . Unlike ordinary reading, spiritual reading is done to affect the heart, not to gain information."[88]

Lectio divina is a form of spiritual reading that incorporates the biblical text with prayer. Lectio divina is an ancient practice that brings four elements of spiritual formation together: scripture, meditation, prayer, and contemplation.

- Lectio: Reading the text
- Meditatio: Meditating on the text
- Oratio: Praying the text
- Contemplatio: Living out the text

Lectio divina is the key to cultivating a heart for prayer and maintaining an invigorating relationship with God. "It is a means of descending to the level of the heart and of finding God."[89] Lectio divina was first practiced in Benedictine monasteries where the monks of the

87. Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 158.
88. Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 160.
89. Michael Casey, *Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina.* (Liguori, MO: Liguori, 1995).

Benedictine tradition regarded reading as an essential element in living a spiritual life. Benedict envisioned his monks making about three hours a day available for personal *lectio*.[90] Lectio divina is an important method of prayer and an effective tool for meditative reading. "Fundamentally, it is the atmosphere of prayer that penetrates every aspect of holy reading that makes it distinctive . . . prayer is the meaning of lectio divina; that is why the exercise of sacred reading is sometimes said to be a technique of prayer."[91]

Lectio divina is a way of reading scripture that can become a spiritual practice for life. It is a means of hearing the Word of God. "The primary organ for receiving God's revelation is not the eye that sees but the ear that hears—which means that all of our reading of Scripture must develop into a hearing of the word of God."[92] Praying God's Word through the practice of lectio divina is one of the most powerful elements of spiritual formation.

Prayer

The concept of prayer intimidates many people. Most Christians feel that they don't pray enough, or they don't know how to develop a vibrant relationship with God in prayer. However, prayer is simply talking to God, and the only way to learn how to pray—is to pray.

Prayer is the conversation where we meet with God.[93] Prayer may seem easy to us, but it cost God dearly to enable us to pray. "It is the redemption of God, the agony of our Lord, that has made our salvation so easy and prayer so simple."[94] If prayer is so simple, why then do we

90. Casey, *Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina,* vi.
91. Casey, *Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina,* 7.
92. Peterson, *Eat This Book,* 79.
93. Paul E. Miller, *A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracted World* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2009).
94. Oswald Chambers, *If You Will Ask: Reflection on the Power of Prayer* (Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House, 1937).

struggle to pray? Are we lazy? Do we crumble too quickly under the temptation of our own flesh to avoid prayer? "It is not prayer that is strenuous, but the overcoming of our own laziness . . ."[95]

Prayer is the place of deepest intimacy between a human being and almighty God. It is the place where we are known and loved to the fullest.[96] The experience of prayer is like being invited to God's bedroom of rest where "peace is found, and we can be naked and vulnerable and free."[97] There is nothing that God doesn't know about the state of our hearts when we pray and nothing the Holy Spirit can't interpret on our behalf.

Romans 8:26 says, "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words."[98]

Prayer often begins as an egocentric conversation with God about our needs and desires, but over time it matures to an exchange where God's person and purposes are central to the conversation. "We pass from thinking of God as part of our life to the realization that we are part of his life. Wondrously and mysteriously God moves from the periphery of our prayer experience to the center. A conversation of the heart takes place, a transformation of the spirit."[99]

In our pandemic world of COVID sufferings, prayer is vital for our mental health and emotional welfare. When we pray, "we decide to leave an ego-centered world and enter into a God-centered world. We leave a world of problems and enter a world of mystery. But it is not

95. Chambers, *If You Will Ask: Reflection on the Power of Prayer,* 33.
96. Richard J. Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1992).
97. Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home,* 2.
98. Rom 8:26.
99. Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home, 31.*

easy. We are used to a world of anxieties, egos and problems, we are not used to wonder, God, and mystery."[100]

The only way that we can learn to pray is to do it. Often, we neglect prayer until a crisis arises, and then we cry out to God in desperation. "The language of prayer is forged in the crucible of trouble."[101] We wait until we are in the pressure of pain to cry out to God for relief. Like a child who cries out to his parents for help when he or she is hungry, cold, tired, or wet. The cry indicates that another person's assistance is needed. The truth is that we need God's assistance every day. Mercifully, Jesus offers us his daily peace amid our world of trouble: "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."[102]

Prayer can take many forms. As previously discussed, lectio divina is a powerful means of combining prayer with mediation on the Word of God. Another form of prayer is called the Divine Office.

Inspired by spiritual forefathers like Thomas Merton and Saint Augustine, praying the Divine Office applies the concept of "monk-life prayer" to ordinary life. Based on the spiritual practices of Athanasius, Benedict and others, the Divine Office takes place "at eight particular times of the day [when] the ancients stopped to remember God's presence, and [chose] to remember that the full complement of creation exists to describe him to us. Each of the Hours has distinct personality for recognizing part of the character of God."[103]

---

100. Eugene H. Peterson, *Answering God: The Psalms as Tools for Prayer* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1989).
101. Peterson, *Answering God: The Psalms as Tools for Prayer*, 73.
102. John 16:33.
103. Lauralee Farrer and Clayton J. Schmit, *Praying the Hours in Ordinary Life* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), 15.

Praying the Divine Office is a "rich experience that draws believers into an encounter with their Creator and creates resonance with Christians of all times who have submitted to the wisdom of the church by engaging in endless prayer and ceaseless song."[104] Monastic prayer is not intended to be "high liturgy," but rather to be prayed by persons who understand that ritual is a part of everyday life. In the same way that people rise, groom, eat, bathe, work and go to sleep at night, praying the hours is a "call to submit to the ritual way of life."[105] Though many modern believers resist the notion of "worship rituals" for fear of becoming rote in their spiritual practices, the Holy Spirit inspired rituals of "meal, prayer, song, and worship from the beginning of faith."[106] Today our patterns of worship become rituals in themselves, and when we incorporate praying the Hours into our worship "we allow simple ritual forms of prayer and song to speak for us and to speak on their own."[107]

Brother Lawrence practiced the presence of God through unceasing prayer. He enjoyed a conversational form of prayer amid his everyday tasks, enjoying constant, conscious, communion with God. He remarked, "There is not in the world, a kind of life more sweet and delightful than that of a continual conversation with God; those only can comprehend it who practice and experience it; yet I do not advise you to do it from that motive; it is not pleasure which we ought to seek in this exercise; but let us do it from a principle of love, and because God would have us."[108]

Without prayer, a believer has no thread of conversation with God. Intellectual assent is not the same as a living communion with Christ. Prayer is the heartbeat of our relationship with

104. Farrer and Schmit, *Praying the Hours in Ordinary Life*, 22.
105. Farrer and Schmit, *Praying the Hours in Ordinary Life*, 23.
106. Farrer and Schmit, *Praying the Hours in Ordinary Life*, 22.
107. Farrer and Schmit, *Praying the Hours in Ordinary Life*, 16.
108. Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004).

the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is the primary means of adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication. God is a communicative God, and he has made humans in his image as conversationalists who can speak with him honestly and intimately. Prayer is the forum where the God of the universe bends his ear to listen to the longings of our hearts. If we are too lazy to pray, possibly we have fallen asleep in our spirits, and we need to wake up and draw near to the heart of God in prayer.

Reflection

The practice of spiritual reflection is an essential element in spiritual formation. Reflection brings the Word and prayer together in a time of contemplation with God. Many of the spiritual disciplines provide opportunities for deeper thought and reflection. Most notably are the practices of sabbath, retreat, solitude, and silence. Incorporating these practices into a regular pattern of examination will heighten a person's awareness of God's presence and provide opportunities for the soul to listen for God's voice and notice him at work in their lives.

Engaging in the practice of reflection also provides opportunities for us to evaluate our goals in a variety of "life categories" and make plans for how we might bring our deepest spiritual desires to fruition. We can borrow from the saints like Benedict, Francis, and Clare in developing a personal Rule of Life. A Rule of Life is a very helpful tool for reflecting on the various roles and responsibilities of our lives and focusing on our plans for spiritual growth. A Rule of Life is like a garden trellis. "The trellis curbs our tendency to wander and supports our rather frail attempts to be nurtured spiritually. Our lives will produce an abundance of fruit for the glory of God."[109]

109. Macchia, *Crafting a Rule of Life,* 15.

A Rule of Life can help us form contemplative rhythms or holy habits. These rhythms "will prepare you to engage your inner life, racial hostility, your mission, and the ever-present polarization you encounter each day on social media or in your own home."[110] Sabbath-keeping, silent prayer, slow reading of Scripture, and commitment to stability are four key elements of spiritual reflection.[111] These rhythms can also become "holy habits" that serve to renew our minds by the power of the Spirit and bear fruit in our character. Holy habits help us appropriate the particular gifts of God, and how they work to bring about a deeper and more lasting transformation in us.[112]

As noted, developing a rhythm of spiritual reflection may include one or more of the following:

Sabbath

Sabbath is an invitation for a person to restore his or her soul. Like a catnap in a sunny windowsill, sabbath is a time for respite; emptying oneself of burdens while simultaneously being filled with the presence of God. It's important to remember that God made the Sabbath for humans. It's a time of mending. "Sabbath imparts the rest of God—actual physical, mental, spiritual rest, but also the *rest* of God—the things of God's nature and presence we miss in our busyness."[113] Sabbath is also preparedness training for things we can't anticipate. Sabbath trains us in practical wisdom, clear judgment, and skillful response. It slows us down enough to notice what truly matters.[114]

110. Villodas, *The Deeply Formed Life*, 21.
111. Villodas, *The Deeply Formed Life*, 22.
112. Lucy Peppiatt, *The Disciple: On Becoming Truly Human* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012).
113. Mark Buchanan, *The Rest of God: Restoring Your Soul by Restoring Sabbath* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2006).
114. Buchanan, *The Rest of God: Restoring Your Soul by Restoring Sabbath*, 3.

Women often find it challenging to step away from their responsibilities to enjoy a time of sabbath rest with the Lord. They commonly cite busyness, family distractions or more urgent activities as barriers to prayer and rest with God.[115] Certainly, there are seasons of life that make sabbath rest more difficult for a woman, especially when raising young children. However, this is usually when a mom needs to enjoy the rest of God most.

In the busyness of our lives, why do we resist God's invitation to stop and rest one day a week? Have we forgotten that Sabbath is an act of obedience and faith? Sabbath "rest" is a holy activity that is meant to focus our hearts and minds on God. God modeled this rest for us in the creation of the world. Though he didn't need to rest after creating the universe because he was tired, he rested because he's holy. God stopped. He enjoyed. He demonstrated restraint. Now, God invites us to refrain from doing everything we have the power to do and enjoy what we've done.[116] Sabbath provides opportunities to reflect on what we've accomplished, appraise the condition of our work, and enjoy a moment of rest.

Sabbath is a God-designed rhythm of life. God created time so we could mark our days and order our years, and he instructed us how to live within the constraints of time on earth. We must remember that sabbath was not a suggestion but a commandment, spoken with the same authority as "do not murder" or "do not commit adultery." Do we diminish the importance of obeying the Sabbath because we idolize busyness and prioritize accomplishments over the rest that our souls desperately need? It's radically countercultural to step away from our schedules,

115. Kruger, *Growing Together: Taking Mentoring Beyond Small Talk and Prayer Requests*, 85.
116. Sleeth, *24/6: A Prescription for a Healthier, Happier Life*, 33.

family demands, ministry opportunities, and work responsibilities to spend concentrated time alone with our Lord and Savior.[117]

Retreat

Jesus invited his disciples to retreat with him, saying, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest for a while."[118] He knew that the labor of ministry had left his disciples exhausted and without proper food and sleep. They needed a retreat from the battles of spiritual work to tend to their wounds and replenish their souls. The same is true for every Christ-follower who is engaged in the battles of life, but most especially for those who are leading for the cause of Christ in the world.

Like the practice of sabbath, "retreat" is a spiritual discipline designed by the Lord for the purpose of being with God for an extended period. It is an opportunity to step back from the routine of daily life and give God our full and undivided attention. We might view "retreat" as a "generous commitment to our friendship with God."[119] Psalm 46:10 commands us to "Be still and know that I am God."[120] This is an invitation to surrender ourselves to God, to relinquish. Practicing the spiritual discipline of retreat, opens a space of time to reflect on the reality that we are not in control. Remembering God's sovereignty beckons us to relinquish the reins into his hands. "To relinquish is to let go of human striving. To release the things that we are clinging to for our identity apart from Christ and to stop distracting our hearts and minds from the pains of

117. Ruth Haley Barton, *Invitation to Retreat.* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2018).
118. Mark 6:30–31.
119. Barton, *Invitation to Retreat,* 5.
120. Ps 46:10.

life. To be still literally means to "let go of your grip" and know "experientially—with full body" that He is God."[121]

Solitude and Silence

Solitude and silence are spiritual disciplines that foster times of deep contemplation with God and help us resist the three enemies of the soul.[122] Solitude is a form of fleeing from the compulsions of this world.

Solitude begins with a time and place to be with God alone. "It's the place of purification and transformation, the place of the great struggle and the great encounter . . . It is the place where Christ remodels us in his own image and frees us from the victimizing compulsions of the world."[123] Solitude molds self-righteous people into gentle, caring, forgiving individuals who are so deeply convinced of their own great sinfulness, and so fully aware of God's mercy, that their life itself becomes ministry.[124]

Solitude is often accompanied by the discipline of silence. Silence is a choice to abstain from speaking for a period to listen to God or seek wisdom from his Spirit. Silence is often practiced during periods of reflection when believers seek insight from God through reading or journaling. Silence quiets the mouth so the heart can speak and listen to the still small voice of God.[125] It is in the silence where we learn to listen to God and remember the weight of words in a world that speaks non-stop. It was out of the silence that God spoke and created the world, and

121. Barton, *Invitation to Retreat,* 80.
122. Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart: Connecting with God through Prayer, Wisdom, and Silence* (New York, NY: Ballantine, 1981).
123. Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart: Connecting with God through Prayer, Wisdom, and Silence, 7.*
124. Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart: Connecting with God through Prayer, Wisdom, and Silence, 30.*
125. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life, 37.*

wise spiritual leaders quiet themselves and listen to the Spirit before preaching, counseling, or speaking unwisely.[126]

Jesus exemplified this pattern of solitude and silence during his earthly life. The gospel writers record Jesus' investment of concentrated alone time with God:

> Matthew 14:23: "And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone . . ."
>
> Mark 1:35: "And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed."
>
> Luke 4:42: "And when it was day, he departed and went into a desolate place. And the people sought him and came to him, and would have kept him from leaving them, . . ."

Establishing a rhythm of life that incorporates the spiritual disciplines of reflection will deepen our intimacy with God and lead us to a place of greater spiritual maturity and faith.

126. Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart: Connecting with God through Prayer, Wisdom, and Silence*, 16.

The Application of Spiritual Practices for Leaders

In a recent interview with The Gospel Coalition, Tim Keller was asked, "Looking back, is there anything you wish you'd done differently in ministry?" Keller profoundly answered, "Absolutely, I should have prayed more. No question."[127]

Spiritual leadership is a calling from God that is supernaturally accomplished through prayer. Few people set out to become spiritual leaders, rather they respond to God's call on their lives and persevere in obedience until either the mission is finished, or their life is over.

Jesus modeled several core principles for spiritual leadership during his earthly life.[128]

1. Jesus stayed close to the people he led.
2. He was transparent with his followers.
3. He stayed on track with his mission always giving glory to the Father.
4. He led with grace and truth.
5. He sacrificed for the benefit of those who followed him.

Jesus' example of spiritual leadership is a radical departure from our natural inclinations to lead or the examples gleaned from corporate or political arenas. Rather than leading from a position of lofty privilege, Jesus led from among the people. "The most powerful position of leadership is beside those God calls us to lead. Among them. If Jesus emptied himself to take on

127. Justin Taylor, "Keller on the Church Crisis," *The Gospel Coalition,* January 4, 2022. (https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/tim-keller-on-the-church-crisis-that-he-never-had-to-face-as-a-pastor-but-you-do (accessed January 4, 2022).
128. Bill Robinson, *Incarnate Leadership: 5 Leadership Lessons from the Life of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009).

the form of a bond servant, shouldn't we empty ourselves of the pretenses and privileges that create distance between us and our people?"

Jesus is the premier example of a spiritual leader. Though he was God veiled in human flesh, he humbly practiced the spiritual disciplines and found his source of spiritual strength in his time of communion with his heavenly Father.

The global pandemic has spotlighted the tremendous need for healthy Christian communities that are led by humble, approachable servant leaders. The church needs leaders with Christlike character who are actively pursuing spiritual maturity. An increase in stress, like we've experienced in the church during COVID, can trigger the dark side of a leader who is not clinging to the Lord in humble dependence.

Conversely, seasons of great ministry success can seduce a leader into a lust for more power, achievement, and praiseworthy attention.[129] "Ambition is a spiritual battleground, and it must be said that in the leadership community of the church, ambition for God's glory and his kingdom easily and subtly morphs into something else."[130] Achievement can become dangerous for gospel communities and detrimental to the health of a leader who becomes driven by the need for control. "Ultimately, God is the achiever; our calling is to be useful tools in his powerful hands."[131] Sabbath, solitude, and silence provide necessary limits for leaders who are confronted with endless demands for time and attention in pastoral ministry. It's tempting for spiritual

129. Host Mike Cosper, "The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill," *Christianity Today* (podcast), MP3 audio, https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/podcasts/rise-and-fall-of-mars-hill/ (accessed October 15, 2021).
130. Tripp, *Lead: 12 Gospel Principles for Leadership in the Church,* 36.
131. Tripp, *Lead: 12 Gospel Principles for Leadership in the Church,* 37.

leaders to live outside their natural limits and bring harm to themselves, their families, and their church communities. A leader's desire to be "limitless" is actually a temptation to "be God."[132]

The reality is that leaders can't do everything or be everywhere. We don't have inexhaustible energy. God has given us boundaries to live within. "Everyone and everything has been designed by God with limits, and it never works, never results in anything good, to attempt to live, minister, and lead outside the boundaries of the limits God has set."[133] Leaders who know their limits will push the gifts of others forward and be willing to submit to the wisdom of others who are gifted in ways that they are not.[134]

It is vital for leaders to have an awareness of their "shadow side." Our "shadow" is the accumulation of untamed emotions, impure motives, and distorted thoughts that, consciously or unconsciously, shape our behaviors. Our shadow side is the damaged and most hidden version of us.[135] The only remedy is to bring all our hidden motives, fears, vulnerabilities, and sorrows to the cross of Christ and remain there; abiding and enduring like Jesus. The Father will meet us in our deepest places of darkness and by his grace, he will shine his light on the shadows in each one of us.[136]

The greatness of a spiritual leader begins and continues in the gentle humility that accompanies our sincere confession of brokenness, and our need for God to heal, redeem and strengthen us from the inside out.[137] In 1 Corinthians 3:4–13, Paul emphasizes the importance of

132. Tripp, *Lead: 12 Gospel Principles for Leadership in the Church,* 72.
133. Tripp, *Lead: 12 Gospel Principles for Leadership in the Church,* 73.
134. Tripp, *Lead: 12 Gospel Principles for Leadership in the Church,* 74.
135. Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spiritually* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014).
136. Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spiritually*, 58.
137. Stephen A. Macchia, *Broken and Whole: A Leader's Path to Spiritual Transformation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015).

love as the transforming power of the soul. Indeed, love is the basis for humility in a leader who serves others well. Love fosters kindness rather than rudeness. Love invites others into community. Love replaces anger and spreads peace and unity in the body of Christ. Leaders need to reorder their lives around love. "If the soul is the most neglected part of the person, then God is the most neglected love of the person. It's time that we come clean with our true affections, the ones that occupy and preoccupy our hearts and minds on a daily basis. These are the loves that need to be reordered."[138]

The process of spiritual formation is a lifelong journey of soul transformation. It is an inward journey of the soul and an outward journey into the world around us. "The journey calls for the disciplines of solitude, silence, prayer, mediation, contemplation, and attentiveness to the movements of our heart . . . They are difficult journeys, and we are not wise to take these journeys alone. Whether we move inward or outward in our spiritual life, we are grounded in God, and guarded by God, who is greater than our hearts and knows everything."[139]

Spiritual leadership is vital to the health and welfare of the church. It is a worthy ambition to lead others for the cause of Christ in this broken world. Spiritual leaders can have a tremendous impact on those they lead—for good or for harm. Leaders must be aware of their shadow sides and pursue wholeness through an active relationship with Jesus. The practices of spiritual formation are instrumental in transforming the souls of leaders into the likeness of Christ. Intentional times of prayer, solitude, silence, sabbath, and retreat help to tether our hearts to our Lord and Savior. Each of us is on a journey of inward transformation, from brokenness to wholeness in Christ. We must therefore be diligent to watch over our hearts, cling to the Lord,

138. Macchia, *Broken and Whole: A Leader's Path to Spiritual Transformation*, 190.
139. Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation: Following the Movements of The Spirit*, xvii.

enjoy his presence, and bask in his love, as we persevere in spiritual maturity and seek to be well-formed leaders for the cause of Christ.

In Chapter Four, I will weave these biblical, theological, and applicational truths together through a series of workshops for the equipping and spiritual development of ministry leaders at River West Church. Over a one-year period, forty women leaders engaged in a series of spiritual formation training exercises that coordinated with their roles as shepherds over small groups of Bible study participants. We will explore the material presented to them and the perceived effectiveness of their training on their leadership development and their personal spiritual growth.

CHAPTER FOUR

PROJECT DESIGN

Introduction

What is the impact of spiritual formation training on women leaders in the church?

This question is the underlying interest behind my project design. While ministry leaders can be equipped with proper tools to facilitate discussions, lead prayer times, or answer theological questions, does helping a leader connect more intimately with Jesus change anything about her ability to spiritually influence others? Are the spiritual formation practices that were modeled by Jesus pertinent for ministry leaders who desire to grow in spiritual maturity? Does a spiritually well-formed leader inspire others to follow Jesus more fervently?

It is possible that the answers to these questions may be too intangible to fully ascertain. It is difficult to evaluate how one person's spiritual life has an impact on the spiritual life of another. However, it is possible to measure how leaders are personally affected by training exercises that target their understanding of spiritual formation and the practices that lead to a well-formed spiritual life.

Therefore, this project was designed to educate a select group of women leaders at River West Church about the purpose and practices of spiritual formation.[1] After an introduction to the topic, the leaders participated in a series of workshops that engaged them in a variety of spiritual formation exercises. This was followed by a three-day offsite retreat. The impact of these

1. See Appendix C for list of participants.

experiences was measured through surveys and journal entries during the 2018–19 ministry season. Indeed, the long-range implication of this training investment was clear after the pandemic hit in 2020. I will reflect on some further associations in Chapter Five.

Project Setting: River West Church Women's Ministry

River West Women's Ministry is widely regarded as one of the pillars of River West Church. The strength of the ministry resides in the leadership infrastructure that provides opportunities for equipping, fellowship, Bible study, and discussion. The leaders are deeply devoted to the Lord and to the women they serve. There are three core ministries for women at River West:[2]

1. The River: The River is a weekly Bible study designed to help women grow in their understanding of God's Word as well as in learning how to apply Scripture to their everyday life. The River provides opportunities for women to make lasting friendships that are centered on a personal relationship with Jesus.

2. OAKS (Older Active Kindred Sisters): OAKS is a group of women 60 years and older who seek to encourage, support, and pray for one another. OAKS women enjoy love, laughter, faith, and friendship as they celebrate their season of life together and find God's grace to meet the various challenges inherent to their stage of life.

2. River West Church, http://www.riverwest.org./connect/women.

3. Woven Together: Woven Together is a community of moms with children—newborn through kindergarten. Small groups of moms are led by seasoned "mentor moms" in meaningful conversations on topics of faith, family, friendship, and motherhood. Woven Together knits a generational cross-section of women together to focus on the delights and challenges of early motherhood.

The River, OAKS, and Woven Together are ministries that follow the September-through-early-June school calendar. However, many other activities (picnics, play dates, hikes, mini retreats, summer studies, etc.) serve to maintain fellowship and welcome newcomers during the summer months.

Annual events also serve to spiritually bless and fortify the women's community:

1. Women's Night of Worship: This December worship service is for women and girls of all ages. The service is led by an all-female worship band. The experience of sight, sound, smell, and taste invites women, who are often busy and overwhelmed with the preparations for the holidays, to experience the blessing of worship at Christmastime. The service uses the arts to inspire beauty and creativity, including ballet, multi-media, special vocal and instrumental performances, Scripture reading, candle lighting, calligraphy, Bible teaching, and an invitation to receive the gospel. Women's Night of Worship has become a favorite Christmas tradition for hundreds of women of all ages.

2. Conferences: Western Seminary's Revive conference brings together women who serve in various ministry roles from throughout the Portland metropolitan area. The

conference provides the opportunity for church leaders to network, exchange ideas, and receive training specific to their ministry context.[3]

The IF:Gathering conference provides gospel-inspired teaching on a variety of topics related to discipleship and spiritual growth. The conference brings women together for spiritual reflection and challenges participants to think biblically about "hot cultural topics."[4]

3. Retreats: Offsite retreats offer women the chance to build spiritual friendships and think deeply about Bible-related topics. Retreats also provide women the opportunity to practice spiritual formation exercises like meditation, prayer, retreat, solitude, and silence.

Project Context: The River Bible Study

This project was designed for ministry leaders at The River. The following are four distinctive aspects of this ministry that provide the context for this project:

- Key Scripture is John 7:37–38: "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"
- In-depth Bible study designed to lead women to faith in Jesus Christ and foster spiritual growth

3. Western Seminary Revive Conference, https://wcm.westernseminary.edu/revive/.
4. If:Gathering Conference, https://www.ifgathering.com/welcome-to-ifgathering/.

- Small group discussion and teaching intended to assist in the application of biblical truth to everyday life
- Multiple times and formats invite women to participate day or night, near or far, in person or on Zoom

The following eight core values define the purpose and mission of The River:

1. To worship: God is the creator and sustainer of life. He is the holy, sovereign Lord, and he is worthy of our worship.
2. To meet Jesus: Our desire is to introduce women to Jesus Christ and encourage them to receive him as their personal Savior.
3. To study the Bible: The River is designed to encourage in-depth daily study of the Bible in a way that is relevant and intensely interesting.
4. To apply Truth: The Word of God is life-changing when it is applied in the power of the Holy Spirit. Women learn how to see God working in their personal experiences as they apply Scripture to their lives.
5. To share the Gospel: Communicating the truth of the Gospel to others is a prerequisite for having impact in our communities. Discussion groups provide safe forums for women to practice communicating personal discoveries and biblical insights to others.

6. To build fellowship: The church is a living fellowship of God's people. The River provides a context for building relationships with others that is relationally supportive, deeply satisfying, and centered on Christ.

7. To provide prayer support: Loving church communities are developed as people share their needs and pray together. Praying in small groups fosters genuine care among participants and increases faith as prayers are answered.

8. To train leaders: Well-trained Christian leaders strengthen the body of the church and provide needed support for other partnering ministries.

Project Context: Historical Framework

The first River class was launched in the fall of 2012. I was mid-stream in my transition to a new role with Bible Study Fellowship when Pastor Guy Gray called and asked if I would pull together a Bible study for some of the women at River West who were growing agitated over his lack of support for the development of a formalized women's ministry. One hundred and sixty women joined our first Tuesday morning study in the Gospel of John and ten "handpicked" leaders agreed to shepherd ten small groups of fifteen participants each. The leaders gathered for an hour before class each week to review the discussion questions, evaluate group dynamics, and share prayer concerns. The class was held every Tuesday at 9:30 a.m. During the first hour the women enjoyed a time of worship (15 minutes) and live teaching (45 minutes). In the second hour, the women broke into their assigned discussion groups to engage in conversations about their lessons and to pray for one another.

At the end of the first study, in the spring of 2013, I was offered a full-time job as the Women's Ministry Pastor. With more time and attention focused on the women of River West, I was able to raise up more leaders and launch an evening study for working women and others who could not participate in a daytime study. In 2013, The River was the only Bible study in our community offering a morning and evening option for women. Coinciding with the morning class, we opened a children's program called The Creek. Now, infants through kindergarten students could come to the church with their moms and learn age-appropriate lessons based on the same passages of Scripture their moms were studying. By the end of the second year, attendance at The River's morning class was 250, and 75 were attending the evening class.

The River continued to grow over the next six years. In 2018–19, 466 women were participating in the adult study, and 70 children were participating in The Creek. Thirty adult leaders and 12 children's leaders were faithfully serving at The River each week.

Over the years, the leadership meetings expanded to 75 minutes with more time for lesson discussion and training. Additional monthly workshops occurred on Saturday mornings, providing an opportunity to bring all the leaders (morning, evening, and Creek Leaders) together for fellowship and training. The infrastructure at The River provided an ideal environment for identifying and training leaders. Many leaders have been launched into other places of kingdom service through their tenure of ministry training and spiritual equipping at The River.

Project Description and Rationale

"For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are
being saved and among those who are perishing."

— The Apostle Paul, *2 Corinthians 2:15*

How does a person become a fragrance of Christ? Like a flower that blooms on the vine and produces the sweet scent of its species, Christians are meant to produce the fragrance of the One they are tethered to. As Jesus declared in John 15:4–5:

> Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

The rationale for this project is to help women become the fragrance of Christ in the community of River West Church. I believe this happens as we engage in a rhythm of life with God that draws us into deeper intimacy with Christ. The practices of spiritual formation challenge us to set aside dedicated time to spend with God in prayer, study, meditation, noticing, listening, silence, solitude, sabbath, fasting, and retreat. I am convinced that when we develop a pattern for living that incorporates space for God, we will flourish in our spirits and become people who reflect Christ to the world around us—both as a blessing and as a calling to less mature believers and unbelievers. I propose that women who are consciously nurturing their spiritual growth will thrive as leaders and spiritual influencers in this generation of God's kingdom history.

The project consists of a series of "Leadership Equipping Workshops" followed by a three-day Leadership Retreat. The workshops took place once a month, for two hours on a Saturday morning between September 2018–May 2019. Only the first three workshops and the culminating retreat are included in my project results. The remaining workshops are listed in Appendix N and Appendix O.

Leadership Equipping Workshop #1

Introduction to Spiritual Formation: The Art of Listening

The concept of spiritual formation is not well known in many evangelical Bible churches. Traditionally, non-liturgical Bible-teaching churches tend to place more emphasis on "learning and applying" than "living and being." At the mention of my doctoral work in spiritual formation, many of the leaders at The River were confused by the term. In response, I introduced the concept of spiritual formation in the first workshop and then led them in a spiritual listening exercise. The workshop began with an assessment of their present understanding of "spiritual formation" and surveyed the types of spiritual practices they were regularly engaging in. I also assessed their understanding of "listening" from human and divine engagement standpoints.

Workshop #1 took place prior to the first week of the 2018–2019 River launch. The intent was that this exercise would prepare the leaders to tune their ears to God as they practiced listening to one another. Following is the two-part teaching outline from the September 2018 workshop.

Part One: What Is Spiritual Formation?

Leadership Equipping Workshop: September 15, 2018

1. What is spiritual formation? What do these words mean to you? Discuss:

    a. Often *spiritual formation* and *discipleship* are used interchangeably. Both entail the lifelong process of being transformed into the loving likeness of Christ. Both are the work of the Holy Spirit in a human heart. There are some differences between the two.

    b. Discipleship

        i. "Disciple" pictures the relationship of following Jesus.

        ii. "Discipleship" means apprenticeship. God is the master/teacher, and I am the follower/learner. The disciple seeks to listen and obey the master.

        iii. The difference between discipleship and spiritual formation is about "initiative."

        iv. Discipleship is our movement toward God. We willingly follow him with the intention to learn, grow, practice, and imitate Jesus.

        v. Spiritual formation refers to God moving toward us, by His Spirit, and our response.

    c. Spiritual Formation

        i. "Spiritual" refers to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is always at work; sometimes we perceive that work, and sometimes we don't. But he is at work, nonetheless.

ii. “Formation” is the response of my heart to be ready for God to work/transform me by his Spirit.

iii. We respond simply by making ourselves available to him and noticing his work in us.

iv. According to the parable of the soils,[6] I make the soil of my heart receptive to God the sower who is scattering seed generously in my life.

v. The question we will be asking ourselves this year: How fertile is the soil of our hearts?

vi. Formation is about how I prepare the soil of my heart to receive all God has for me.

2. Leadership Equipping Workshops: Plan

a. This year we’re focusing on the revival of our souls. We want to wake up and experience a fresh movement of the Holy Spirit in and through us.

b. We are going to learn how to notice God working in and around us.

c. Our aim is to learn how to prepare the soil of our hearts to be fertile ground where God can sow seed that will sprout lush new life.

d. Hand out schedule of workshops.[7]

6. Luke 8:4–15.
7. See Appendix B for schedule of Leadership Equipping Workshops.

e. Share topics that will be covered.

f. Explain upcoming surveys.

Part Two: The Art of Listening

Leadership Enrichment Workshop: September 15, 2018

This workshop was adapted from material presented by David Currie and Stephen Macchia at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.[8]

Listening . . . it is not something we do very well in our fast-paced, hurried world. Even in our most intimate relationships, (husband-wife, parent-child, sister, or friend) "listening" is a missing element because those who are most present with us also have agendas for us. We are far too quick to speak and slow to listen.

Large Group Exercise: White Board Responses

What are the attributes of listening? (See examples below)

- Attentiveness to another person
- Unhurried presence
- Focused on another person

8. David Currie, Stephen Macchia, spoken to author in class at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary's Spiritual Retreat, Enders Island, CT, May 2018.

- Silence
- Imagining what's being said
- Asking insightful questions
- Validating what's heard
- Discipline of restraint
- Commitment of time and trust
- Expression of love

What is the experience of being heard? (See examples below)

- Nonverbal cues
- Acknowledgement of meaning
- Expression of empathy
- Feeling known/understood
- Asked insightful questions

Can you recall the last time you listened well or felt truly heard? (Discuss)

As leaders, and especially as teachers, we often feel that we need to speak. People are looking to us to tell them how to think or what to do. There are times for that, of course, but one of our greatest privileges as shepherds of women or children, is to be attentive and present for another person and really listen with a desire to *know*. How would our relationships within the community of Christ deepen and grow if we truly listened to one another?

Often counselors provide little more than a listening ear to people who need to talk and be heard. People are needy. They are lonely for someone who will think about them when they are not in view. We are a society of people who are desperate to stand out as special and significant in someone's eyes. We are created by God to be known and to know others deeply.

Certainly God, our creator, knows us intimately, as Psalm 139:1–12 reminds us. (Read aloud and notice verses 1–6 are about God's knowledge of us and verses 7–12 describe his presence with us).[9]

This is the relationship we have with God. God knows us, and he is present with us. It's how we have been created to relate with him and with each other in the body of Christ: to be truly KNOWN and relationally PRESENT with each other.

Often the best help we can offer to the women who walk through our doors is simply to reflect the presence of Jesus to them. We don't have to provide answers to their problems. We can minister to their hearts by just listening to their stories. We don't even need to respond with a comment or a solution. Too often we try to be their savior instead of just being present and letting God do his work through the process. Maybe all we need to express is empathy and love.

I have struggled with this myself. I am often so quick to want to identify with someone's story that as soon as I think about a similar experience that I've had, I tell my story. My intention is to communicate a shared experience. I think I'm relating and building affinity, but I've simply turned the spotlight onto myself and stopped listening. When I learned about the "Art of

9. Ps 139:1–12.

Listening", I realized how I was unintentionally sabotaging these great listening encounters rather than forgetting myself and being fully present to the other person's story.

How do we practice the Art of Listening?

1. Listen without offering wisdom or opinion.
2. Don't interject your agenda into the conversation.
3. Be present in the moment with the other person.
4. Resist looking for hidden meanings, making judgments, or contextualizing what you hear.
5. Know that the purity of listening comes through presence.
6. Trust that God will care for the other person better than we can.
7. Surrender the need to interpret what you hear.
8. Resist the desire for "one-upmanship" or making comparisons with your own story.
9. Be trustworthy with the authenticity and raw material of another person's life.

Listening Exercise

- Objective: to practice active/non-judgmental listening with one other person.
- Method: instructor and one participant role model exercise first with subsequent reflective conversation from the group. Then break large group into triads to practice and reflect on experience.

- Format: get into groups of three. One participant speaks, one listens, one watches timer and observes. Time: 6 minutes + 1 minute addition + 1 minute of silent prayer + 2 minutes of reflection = 10 minutes per person.

- Conversation prompt: "Tell me a story from your summer when you experienced the presence of God through his Word, in your surroundings, as an answer to prayer, or in the quiet of your spirit?"

Workshop #1 Survey Results and Comments

Thirty women participated in this workshop, and thirty surveys were completed for this project. Before the workshop started, participants were asked to evaluate how well they understood the concept of "spiritual formation".[10] Using a scale from 0–10, (0 = no understanding and 10 = excellent understanding), the average response was 3.78. Most of the group felt they had little understanding of the term or its application to their spiritual life.[11]

Question #1 asked the participants to describe in their own words what "spiritual formation" means. The following is a selection of responses:

- Participate #5: "Intimate knitting with my spirit and God's to become more like him."

- Participant #8: "My belief basis (foundation) coupled with my God-given gifts."

10. See Appendix D for a sample of workshop #1 survey, conducted September 15, 2018.
11. See Appendix E for workshop #1 survey results. Data collected on September 15, 2018.

- Participant #10: “Sanctification. The process by which we engage our hearts, life, mind etc., to the Lord in submission and humility.”
- Participant #12: “The evolvement of a person’s spiritual journey.”
- Participant #15: “The ongoing process/journey of my soul.”
- Participant #18: “The practical ways used to grow spiritually.”
- Participant #23: “Inception of a spiritual relationship with God and transformation into a deeper understanding.”
- Participant #29: “Establishing a foundation of a personal relationship with Christ.”

When asked question #3, “What spiritual practices do you regularly engage in?”, the majority identified Bible reading and prayer as two formational practices they are regularly enjoying.

- 76% indicated they engage in regular Bible reading, study or meditation.
- 73% identified prayer as a regular part of their daily practice.
- Only 16% indicated that they routinely practice silence, solitude, noticing, or listening.

Interestingly, when asked in Question #7, “How often do you practice listening to God?”, (0 = never and 10 = several times a day), the average response was 6.3. Participants reflected some of the ways they engage in spiritual listening practices:

- Participant #1: “Frequently while walking and reading scripture. It comes alive.”
- Participant #3: “I leave space post-prayer.”

- Participant #6: “By being in the word regularly. By being silent with him, trying to be more deliberate at this.”
- Participant #11: “Reading his word, studying his word, then thinking how it affects my life.”
- Participant #13: “Being still, quiet—asking him to speak.”
- Participant #17: “Quiet with a notebook and time after/during reading Scripture, notes on sermon or devotional.”
- Participant #18: “Allowing space in my life.”
- Participant #21: “Alone time—quiet reflection.”
- Participant #26: “Getting up before my kids, spending time listening and not just speaking. Reading the Bible.”
- Participant #30: “Sit or walk or experience life with him. Letting him speak through the Word or a person or experience.”

Although the term, “spiritual formation” was unfamiliar to most, the leaders were familiar with the practice of Bible mediation and prayer, and most were engaged in these practices with the intention of listening to God’s voice and seeking to discern his presence.

Leadership Enrichment Workshop #2: The Word as Prayer

The second workshop was held on October 13, 2018. In general, River leaders tend to be women who are passionate about the Word of God and prayer. This workshop was designed to introduce them to the practice of lectio divina. The hope was that this would provide a new

spiritual formation practice for bringing the Word and prayer together—inspiring greater opportunities to meditate and listen to God's voice in prayer.

The Word as Prayer: Lectio Divina

Leadership Enrichment Workshop: October 13, 2018

This workshop was adapted from material presented by Susan Currie at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.[12]

1. Introduction: The Word as Prayer/Meditation

   We are good at reading the Word for instruction, context, and understanding. But how well do we read for meditation, prayer, listening to God, or for life change? Can we truly hear the Spirit of God through the pages of Scripture? Does it matter?

2. Read Luke 8:4–8: The parable of the sower. (Pause and reflect)

   The Seed = Word of God. The Soil = The human heart. Luke 8:8c = "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." The good soil hears the Word of God.

3. Jesus explains the parable: Luke 8:9–15. (Read and reflect)

   The good soil hears the Word of God, holds fast to it in an honest good heart and bears fruit with patience.

12. Susan Currie, spoken to author in a class a Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, May 2018.

4. Instruction: Hearing the Word of God

    a. Greek Word for “hear” = “Akouo” (acoustics) means to hear, understand, learn, and obey.

    b. Hebrews 3:7–4:13 (Read): Receiving the Word with an open heart enables us to enter REST with God. The Israelites heard the Word of God, but they hardened their hearts. Therefore, they did not enter God’s rest. To hear God is:

        - To receive his Word with an open heart. (Tilled, watered, and fertile soil)
        - To respond in obedience which signifies faith.
        - To enter in rest—resting with God and in God.

    c. 1 Thessalonians 2:13 (Read). Discuss: How does this happen?

        - John 15:7 (Read). Discuss: Abiding in Jesus.
        - John 14:26 (Read). Discuss: The Holy Spirit is our helper.
        - 1 John 2:27 (Read). Discuss: The anointing of the Holy Spirit.
        - Hebrews 1:3 (Read). Discuss: The glory of God in Christ.
        - Hebrews 7:25 (Read). Discuss: The intercession of Christ for believers.
        - John 16:13–15 (Read). Discuss: The revelation of truth from the Holy Spirit.

5. Key point: The Spirit is listening to the conversation that is happening between the Father and the Son and making things known to us. And the Spirit is praying for us with groans too deep for words. Romans 8:26–27:

> Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.[13]

6. Discussion

    a. How can we engage with God's Word as a means for meditation, contemplation, and prayer?

    b. How can we prepare the soil of our hearts to really hear from God?

    c. How can we attune our souls to the Holy Spirit tapping on our hearts?

    d. What does the story of the two men on the road to Emmaus reveal to us in Luke 24:13–35?

7. Application

    a. We must cultivate a practice of noticing God's Spirit at work in our lives: How?

        - Listen to the taps on your heart.
        - Pay attention to the burning.
        - Abide with Jesus.
        - Examine your heart daily. What is resonating with you?

13. Rom 8:26–27.

- Ask yourself questions: “What might God be doing in me today? What am I noticing about myself and the world around me? If I am really listening to God, what am I hearing?

8. The Practice of Lectio Divina

God is still speaking to us through his written and spoken Word. We need to listen because it is his Living Word. I want to teach you a four-fold exercise that will prepare your heart to hear from God through contemplation on his Word.

It’s called *lectio divina* (two pronunciations/Latin vs. English). It began in the Benedictine Monasteries in the early 500s. Lectio divina is one of the oldest practices of reading the Word out loud, in community, for prayer and worship.

1. Lectio = Reading/listening to the Word (HEAD)
2. Meditatio = Meditating/mulling over the Word (HEART)
3. Oratio = Praying/conversing with God about the Word (HABIT)
4. Contemplatio = Contemplating/resting in God’s Word (HUSH)

Let’s practice: (See handout.)[14]

<u>Selected Passage</u>

Deuteronomy 6:4–9 English Standard Version (ESV)

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and

14. See Appendix G for Lectio Divina handout.

when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Exercise: Break into groups of 3 or 4.

Lectio Format

- Put everything down (except the leader has the printed page and the reading).
- Relax attentively.
- Invite the group to close their eyes, so they're listening to and speaking to God, not each other. But they are listening together, to God through each other, so invite them to silently pray their way around the circle, for each person to be able to listen to God.

First Reading: "Head"

- Direct the group to notice whatever word or phrase grabs their attention, and to stay with that.
- Read the Scripture.
- Ask the group "Now say back to God, aloud, the word or phrase that captured your attention."

Second Reading: "Heart"

- Direct the group to notice what they're feeling inside as the Scripture is read.
- Read the Scripture.
- Ask the group "Now say back to God, aloud, what you're feeling." (One word)

Third Reading: "Habit"

- Direct the group to notice how what they've been noticing might be something God is saying to them through his Word.
- Read the Scripture.
- Ask the group, "Now say back to God, aloud, what it is you think he's saying to you, something he's inviting you to do or to be."

Hush:

- "Hush." A moment of silence—sit with it —then pray for the person on your left.
- The leader closes in a wrap-up prayer.

Reflection: Sharing. What did you experience?

9. Concluding remarks

    a. Listening to God through his Word is a powerful way to prepare to serve him.
    b. What do our people need to hear from God through us? How can we know unless we first listen and hear from God? This is for sermon prep as well as for teaching children, counseling, or leading meetings.
    c. How might listening to the presence and activity of God shape our conversations and decisions?
    d. How might it enrich our daily experience with Jesus?

Workshop #2 Survey Results and Comments

Twenty-six women participated in this workshop, and twenty-six surveys were completed. Survey #2 was given to the leaders before the second workshop began, and it was designed to capture two primary data points:[15]

1. What did the participants learn about spiritual formation in Workshop #1?

2. What do the participants know about the practice of lectio divina?

When asked again, "How well do you understand spiritual formation?", the average group response was 5.5 on a scale of 0–10 (0 = no understanding; 10 = excellent understanding). This was a moderate increase over the first survey average of 3.78. When asked again to describe "spiritual formation" in their own words, participants responded as follows:[16]

- Participant #22: "The transforming work of God's Holy Spirit in a believer's heart, mind and soul as we journey through a life of faith in Christ."

- Participant #18: "God moves towards us through the Holy Spirit, and we respond."

- Participant #11: "My spiritual walk—my growth through the Spirit—my part in my church bringing believers together."

- Participant #17: "The development of understanding and practice of spiritual expressions."

15. See Appendix F for a sample of the workshop #2 survey, conducted October 13, 2018.
16. See Appendix H for workshop #2 survey results. Data collected on October 13, 2018.

- Participant #7: “Using specific spiritual discipline with the goal of becoming more like Christ.”
- Participant #4: “It is how God is changing and growing a person in learning to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit.”
- Participant #3: “God drawing us near to him and us responding to him.”
- Participant #12: “Process of growing spiritually. Sanctification.”
- Participant #2: “Growth in spiritual life by utilizing practices which enhance that growth.”
- Participant #1: “Moving closer to God through Bible study, worship, prayer and just in daily life. Turning toward him more and more.”
- Participant #6: “Formed habits that encourage consistent growth toward maturity.”

Although the leaders seemed reticent to rate themselves very highly on the numeric scale, their responses showed noticeable improvement in their understanding of the concept.

Part two of the survey assessed the participants’ understanding of lectio divina. The first question asked them to rate their understanding on a scale of 0–10 (0 = no understanding; 10 = excellent understanding). Seventeen of 26 respondents said they had zero understanding of lectio divina. Only two respondents accurately described what lectio divina entails. The remaining respondents who indicated some level of understanding made random guesses that only served to

validate their unfamiliarity with the concept. The average total response based on the scale provided was 1.8.[17]

Leadership Enrichment Workshop #3: Spiritual Practices for Leaders

Spiritual Practices for Leaders Workshop: January 12, 2019

The material for this workshop was based on Chapter Two of this thesis-project.

Introduction to Spiritual Formation

The problem:

- Review the state of our world today and the statistics from LifeWay research.[18]
- We don't drift into spiritual maturity and godliness. We must choose to abide with Christ and intentionally incorporate spiritual practices that keep us close to him. As D.A. Carson says, we are prone to drift.[19]
- Why then are spiritual practices important? The practice of spiritual disciplines helps Christ-followers resist the gravitational pull of the flesh toward self-sufficiency and independence from God. Focusing on Jesus enables a person to resist the natural drift toward godlessness by actively pursuing holiness and spiritual maturity instead.

17. See Appendix H for workshop #2 survey results. Data collected on October 13, 2018.
18. LifeWay Research, *The State of American Theology Study: Research Report 2020* (Ligonier Ministries 2020), http://www.lifewayresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Ligonier-State-of-Theology-2020-White-Paper.pdf.
19. D. A. Carson, *The Love of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 23.

- What are the hindering forces? The world, the flesh, and the devil. Have volunteers read the following verses:
    - Romans 1:28–32 (World)
    - 1 Timothy 4:12–16 (Flesh)
    - Ephesians 6:10–18 (Devil)

The movement of Spiritual Formation

- Renewed popularity
- Cautions about just seeking a spiritual experience
- What is Christian Spiritual Formation?

My definition of Spiritual Formation

- "Spiritual formation is the movement of the Holy Spirit, in a responsive human heart, that awakens a person to the activities of God, who is working to transform him or her into the likeness of His Son, Jesus Christ."
- Discuss parts of definition. (Print 7 cards with phrases and Scripture and have small groups discuss words and offer an explanation.) Then I will share detailed description of my definition.

Spiritual practices of Jesus:

- Break into groups. Handout worksheet with Bible verses and topics. Have groups observe Jesus' practices in these areas and share with the larger group.

- Jesus is the premier example of a perfect, spiritually formed person. He is the Son of God, (fully God and fully human), who is without sin and wholly filled with the Spirit of God. Jesus Christ is the exact representation of the likeness of God in human form. See Table 2 regarding the Eight Spiritual Practices of Jesus and discuss with group.

Table 2. Eight Spiritual Practices of Jesus

PRACTICE	OBSERVATION
SOLITUDE	Luke 5:16; Mark 6:46, 1:35
PRAYER	Luke 5:16; Matthew 26:36, 14:19; Luke 6:12; Hebrews 5:7; Luke 22:32; John 17:20–26, 14:16; Luke 11:1–13
FASTING	Luke 4:2-4; Matthew 16:16–18
WORD	Luke 4:16–19; John 1:1, 10:22–38, Matthew 22:29; John 5:39; Luke 24:45–47
OBEDIENCE	Philippians 2:5–7; Luke 22:42; Proverbs 3:5–7; Hebrews 5:7–9
FRIENDSHIP	Luke 7:34; Matthew 17:1–13, 16:18
EVANGELISM	John 4 1–42; Matthew 28:18–20
SERVING	John 13:1–5; Mark 10:45; John 3:16

Conclusion

- Tie into The River Message this week about small acts of faith producing big results.
- This is true of spiritual practices in our lives. Small daily acts of faith produce heart soil that is ripe for sowing seeds and producing a spiritual harvest. This is your life with God.
- Share my story of life transformation through the practices of studying the Word, prayer, worship, service, etc.
- This is the mission of The River: to grow in knowledge of God's Word, apply truth of Scripture to our life, and provide opportunity for lasting friendships. This is spiritual growth and maturity on an individual level and a community level. WE + Jesus = US, The Church.
- Spiritual practices lead us to the abundant life we crave—a life that is daily abiding with Jesus. (Read John 10:10)

Discuss: What hinders you from spending concentrated time with the Lord? Share with one another and pray in small groups.

Key truth: enjoying Jesus in the small daily practices of life gives rest to our souls and joy to our hearts.

More Leadership Equipping Workshops

Workshop #3 was followed by a series of workshops that continued to build into the leaders' understanding of spiritual formation and the practices that cultivate a well-formed life. For this thesis-project, only the first three workshops are shared in detail. See the appendix for the full schedule of workshops with teaching outlines and exercises.[20]

In the spring of 2019, I purchased a copy of Ruth Haley Barton's book, *Sacred Rhythms,* for each of my leaders, and we continued to explore the various practices of spiritual formation together. On our final gathering in May, I surveyed the leaders again to ascertain their understanding of spiritual formation and the practices they were now applying to their lives.

Workshop #3–5 Survey Results and Comments[21]

Twenty-one women participated in this survey.

Question 1: What is spiritual formation in your own words?

The following is a sample of responses:[22]

- Participant #7: "Using specific tools to learn about myself and God in order to draw closer to him."

20. See Appendix N–O for workshops #4 and #5, conducted on March 9 and April 12, 2019.
21. See Appendix I for sample of survey #3, conducted May 11, 2019.
22. See Appendix J for survey #3 results. Data collected on May 11, 2019.

- Participant #18: “Seeking spiritual growth by the power of the Holy Spirit.”
- Participant #38: “Practice of connecting with God in my spirit—intentionally allowing the Holy Spirit to form my heart, mind and soul.”
- Participant #16: “It is the process of actively creating space and doing things to connect with the Holy Spirit so that you can grow closer to God.”
- Participant #22: “The work of the Holy Spirit and God’s Word transforming the heart, soul and mind of the born-again believer as the believer’s will surrenders to the will of God.”
- Participant #5: Developing my most precious part, the part that is nearest to God. The part that is the seed and when watered grows out of me.”
- Participant #2: “Study, discipline and taking care of one’s own soul to grow deeper in love with Christ.”
- Participant #23: “Developing a true/correct understanding of one’s essence (soul)—the real me —and enabling a closer relationship with God.”
- Participant #24: “Entering into God’s process of growing me spiritually, becoming closer to him so that he can use me in leadership.”
- Participant #6: “Development and practice of spiritual disciplines.”

Question #2: I have developed a rhythm of spiritual practices this year? (True or False)

- 90.5% (21 of 23) indicated true.

- 9.5% (2 of 23) indicated false.

Question #3: If true, please indicate which practices you have employed, and how you have grown as a result of the Leadership Equipping Workshops?

- Listening to God: 86% (18 of 21)
- Noticing God: 76% (16 of 21)
- Lectio divina —Word as Prayer: 24% (6 of 21)
- Prayer: 71% (15 of 21)
- Attending to your soul: 52% (11 of 21)
- Solitude with God: 71% (15 of 21)
- Living with limits: 38% (8 of 21)
- Other practices or points of learning: 10% (2 of 21)

Comments

- Participant #6: "I was already practicing some of these exercises, but I've experienced going deeper."
- Participant #18: "I've been encouraged to be aware and thoughtful."
- Participant #21: "The Holy Spirit's work is changing me and revealing to me where I need to grow and change."

- Participant #1: “I have developed a much stronger time with God each morning of devotional prayer and silence. I am praying and staying strong and regular through the summer.”

Question #4: If false, what has hindered your growth or participation in these spiritual practices?

- Participant #3: Forgetfulness and busyness.
- Participant #7: Death of family members and finishing seminary.

Question #5: On a scale of 0–10 (0 = no understanding; 10 = excellent understanding), how would you assess the development of your understanding of spiritual formation this year?

- Survey respondents averaged 6.6 on the scale which represents a nearly two-fold increase (78%) over their initial 3.78 rating.

Question #6: On a scale of 0–10, (0 = no change; 10 = complete change), how would you rate the change in your participation with spiritual practices this year as a result of the leadership equipping workshops?

- Participants indicated that they increased their engagement with spiritual practices from an average of 4 to 7 on the scale during the nine months of training workshops. This represents a significant increase (75%) in participation with spiritual formation practices during the course of the training.

Spiritual Retreat: Rockaway Beach, Oregon: September 20–22, 2019

At the culmination of our year of spiritual formation training, and to prepare our hearts for the launch of the next ministry year, I planned a three-day spiritual retreat for The River leadership team. The purpose of the weekend was to teach the leaders about the spiritual practice of "retreat" and give them opportunities to practice times of solitude and silence with the Lord. I adapted material from Ruth Haley Barton's *Invitation to Retreat* as a curriculum.[23]

I rented a large house at Rockaway Beach on the Oregon Coast and provided accommodations for 30 participants to enjoy the weekend.

On Friday night the goal was to spend some time strengthening the bonds of spiritual friendship and introduce the concept of spiritual retreat. The following is the schedule and teaching outline from Friday night:[24]

Friday, September 20, 2019

- 6:00 p.m. Arrival/check-in
    - Lasagna dinner provided
    - Snacks/appetizers
- 7:00 p.m. Introductions: Ice-breaker questions:
    - Basic introductions

23. Ruth Haley Barton, *Invitation to Retreat* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2018).
24. See Appendix K for full retreat schedule.

    - What is your favorite time of day and why?
    - What is your favorite local restaurant and the meal you most enjoy eating when you are there?

- 7:45 p.m. Session #1: Introduction to Retreat (30 minutes)
    - Small group discussions + Prayer (30 minutes)
    - Large group sharing (15 minutes)
    - Worship (15 minutes)
    - Instruction for morning
- 9:15 p.m. Quiet and rest

Invitation to Retreat: Session 1, Friday Night

What comes to your mind when I say the word, "Retreat"? (Discuss).

"Retreat" is a concept highjacked by secular and religious organizations to mean an offsite intensive training or teaching experience that is heavily scheduled and highly productive. Retreats can be filled with workshops, games, entertainment, late night chats, etc. and then send you home overloaded with information and wearier than when you arrived. This is not what Jesus was inviting his disciples into when he said in Mark 6:30–31, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while."

The disciples had been engaged in exciting ministry and were so eager to share with Jesus all they had done and taught in Jesus' Name. But Jesus knew that they needed some self-care and replenishment, so he invited them to retreat with him for a time of quiet communion and conversation.

> The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. And he said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat.[25]

To "retreat" is to engage in a spiritual practice designed by the Lord for the purpose of being with God for an extended time. It's an opportunity to step back from the routine of daily life and give God our full undivided attention. Think of retreat as a "generous commitment to our friendship with God."[26]

Truly, the most precious gift we give to—and receive from—our friends is time. Because our friendships are important to us, we carve out time to have lunch, call them on the phone, meet for coffee, etc. Even when life is very busy, we will block out time for our closest friends, because the relationship is important to us, and we know that friendships deepen through time and shared experiences.

The same is true of our relationship with God. We yearn for time with him to talk, listen, notice, read, and pray. We long to see things through his perspective and to bring our hearts before him in vulnerability and truth. With a good friend, you can confess your greatest pains

25. Mark 6:30–31.
26. Barton, *Invitation to Retreat,* 4.

and struggles: cry, laugh, complain, etc. With God, not only can you tell him everything, but you will receive his divine comfort and wisdom in return.

The very first retreat of all retreats is the practice of sabbath. God has designed for us a rhythm of life that includes work and rest. God ordered creation around time—he is outside of time—but he made time for us so we can order our lives and mark our days. Sabbath was not a suggestion, but a commandment along the same lines as "do not murder" and "do not commit adultery", and yet most of us think nothing of not obeying the Sabbath. We idolize busyness and prioritize our accomplishments over the rest that our souls desperately need. It's radically countercultural to step away from all the schedules, family demands, ministry opportunities—all very good and wonderful things—to experience retreat with the Lord and our sisters in Christ.

Too often we think of retreat as a selfish activity because when we step away, we must rely on others to step into our roles and responsibilities.[27] Or we feel guilty leaving our family members to fend for themselves. But too often we are standing between the people we love and their dependency on God. Because we're so good at caring for the needs of others—the people we care for don't really have to depend on God because we've inadvertently trained them to depend on us.

(Share how I can be so readily available to meet all the needs of my disabled son so that he relies on me to be his rock of stability and trust, rather than the Lord. Truly, the Lord has given me to him as a support and caregiver, but Adam still needs to find his ultimate care and

27. Barton, *Invitation to Retreat*, 25.

security in Christ; I am just the Lord's instrument. So, it's good for Adam when I step away for a time, and he must rely on the Lord to provide his care through others.)

Think of Retreat as Strategic Withdrawal

I'd like to invite you to think about "retreat" in military terms: as a "strategic withdrawal" from the battles of life.[28] We all need to put distance between ourselves and the battlegrounds of our lives. When a military commander orders his troops to retreat—it's often because they are losing ground in the battle, and there is danger ahead for them. He may see that they are too tired to press on or becoming ineffective in their mission. Maybe there have been some casualties, and their spirits are low. Often, we think of a "military retreat" as a negative thing—it's an indicator of weakness, loss, or failure. But, to *not* retreat may mean greater injuries or even death. In fact, retreat is a wise tactic at the appropriate time. It gives rest to the troops and an opportunity to tend to wounds and thwart the enemy's momentum.

There are times in our own lives when we need to strategically withdraw from the battles of our lives to reevaluate both our methods and our madness. We may not realize how tired we've become or how hard we've been working to meet other people's expectations. We may not be aware of our own compulsions or how to untangle the threads of busyness. Maybe our hearts are getting hard toward the Lord, and we don't even realize it because we are not able to stop and examine what is going on inside of us. Or maybe we've become numb to a reality in our lives—possibly grief or disappointment that needs to be attended to like an open wound.

28. Barton, *Invitation to Retreat*, 11.

There is another reality at play for us—there is an enemy of our soul, the devil, who is constantly at work to dismantle the ministry of God's Word (e.g., The River). He is always trying to stir up trouble, and he wants to discourage us, so we'll just give up before we even get started. Strategic withdrawal or retreat is the time when we are strengthened for the battle by putting on the whole armor of God.

> The Whole Armor of God
>
> Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,[29]

Notice there are battles raging all around us, battles that are happening between the cosmic powers in the heavenly places. We don't see these battles, but we feel the effects of them in our lives and ministry. Satan is devious, and his tactics are ever-changing. It is important that we retreat from our lives often enough to reevaluate where and how we are taking hits. We must retreat in order to contemplate where we may be in danger. If we can identify where the battles are raging, then we can pull back to rest, heal and set new strategies before reengaging.[30]

29. Eph 6:10–17.
30. Barton, *Invitation to Retreat,* 12.

Of course, there are other kinds of battles that simply come from living life in a broken world and from being sinful people. One of the problems of living in a constant state of technological distraction is that we seldom get in touch with our humanness. Our feelings of sadness, emptiness, and pain are glossed over by the constant interruptions of our smartphones, so it's hard for us to find peace and rest deep within our souls. We need the kind of comfort that is only found in God's presence. We need quiet spaces to connect with God and our own souls.

Think: *Where are the battles raging in your life right now? Where do you need to step back for a few days and rest—relinquishing everything to the Lord so you can replenish your body, mind and soul?*

The Rs of Retreat:[31]

- A **Rhythm** of life in Christ
- To **Replenish** our bodies, minds, and souls
- Enabling us to **Recognize** and **Respond** to God's presence
- So we can **Recalibrate** our lives based on God's discernment
- And then **Reengage** from a more **Refreshed** place
- Thus, establishing more **Regular** patterns of **Returning** and **Resting** in God.

To retreat is to be invited into a time of rest and reflection with God and others.

31. Barton, *Invitation to Retreat,* 7.

Discuss (Small groups)

- What battle lines do you need to strategically withdraw from this weekend?
- What kind of replenishment do you need most: Body? Mind? or Soul?
- Pray for one another

Discuss (Large group)

- Reflect on common themes
- Worship

Saturday's full schedule and teaching:

Saturday, September 21, 2019

- 7:00 a.m. Early risers walk and talk
- 8:30 a.m. Breakfast
- 9:30 a.m. Session #2 Invitation to Retreat with God
    - Worship (15 minutes)
    - Devotional: Relinquish – Psalm 46 (15 minutes)
    - Exercise #1 Time alone with God – prayer and journal exercise (120 minutes)
- 12:00 p.m. Reflection (30 minutes)

- 12:30 p.m. Lunch
- 1:30 p.m. Session #3 Invitation to Retreat with each other
    - Break into small groups – Share "A Day in The Life" (30 minutes)
    - Large group – Share the most interesting things you learned about each other (20 minutes)
    - Introduce activity (10 minutes)
    - Team scavenger hunt (60 minutes)
- 3:30 p.m. Free time
- 6:00 p.m. Dinner
- 7:00 p.m. Invitation to Release in prayer
    - Lectio divina: Matthew 6:25–34 (60 minutes)
    - Worship (15 minutes)
    - "Godspeed" & discussion (45 minutes)
- 9:00 p.m. Rest

Invitation to Retreat with God: Session 2, Saturday Morning

RELINQUISH

Read Psalm 46

There is no other time when I feel more out of control than when I step onto an airplane. First, I still don't understand how planes fly even though it's been explained to me many times. But even when I can muster up my trust in the aeroengineers who created these ginormous flying machines, there are many other reasonable concerns/fears that I experience when I step onto a plane. We've all seen planes fall from the sky—or soar into buildings in acts of terrorism. We've learned about bombs being smuggled into suitcases or hidden in the soles of shoes. It's not unfounded to consider the possibility that any flight I take may not actually arrive at my desired destination. Stuff happens that is out of my control. In fact, I can't really control anything about my flying experience except to pray and relinquish my life and safety to God. I can't control the weather—including storms, wind, or lightning. I can't control whether the plane has been serviced properly by the mechanics on the ground. I have no control over whether all the passengers are safe people—has TSA done their job properly? Is there an air marshal hiding on the plane? I don't know. I'm not supposed to know. If the pilots die during my flight, it's not like I can scoot over into the driver's seat and take over. I don't know how to fly a plane. I'm totally out of control . . . which is why I find flying to be so relaxing.

Because I am utterly powerless, I realize the only thing I can do is relinquish all my fears and concerns to the Lord in prayer and fully trust him with my life. Whether I live to land at the next airport or whether I die in flight, I will be with him either way. Nothing can separate me from the love of God. Jesus modeled ultimate surrender when he said on the cross, "Into your hands, I commit my spirit."[32]

32. Luke 23:46.

To relinquish is to let go, to surrender ourselves to God. When we take time away from our lives to strategically withdraw from the battles, it's an opportunity to reflect on the fact that we really aren't in control after all. The irony is that the way I feel on an airplane is the way I should feel about every facet of my life. I can't control whether I'll be safe behind the wheel of my car, the choices my husband or children make, the effect of my work in ministry, the health of myself or loved ones, or whether the sun will rise tomorrow. So, I start every day with a prayer of relinquishment and then relax into the journey God leads me on.

To relinquish is to let go of human striving and human effort. To let go of the things we cling to for our identity apart from Christ and the things we use to distract ourselves from the pain of life. To give up our attempts at controlling everyone and everything.

Relinquishment is surrender, and it's what David wrote in Psalm 46:10, "Be still, and know that I am God." To be still literally means to "let go of your grip" and know "experientially—with your full body" that I am God."[33]

How do we *know* something with our full body? We don't just agree in our thinking (intellectual assent), but we submit with our whole body and soul—surrender. We exhale, rest, breathe, trust, pray, release, submit, and wait. In other words, "Let go of your grip and experience letting God be God in your life." Will you think for a moment, *what are you holding tightly?*

When we let go, we give the Spirit of God opportunity to take the lead. He is able to help us think more creatively about our lives and responsibilities. He opens new ideas, introduces us

33. Barton, *Invitation to Retreat,* 65.

to new ways of viewing our circumstances, crosses our paths with people we need to meet and engage with. He takes us places beyond our human capacity to think or imagine.

To relinquish is not to negate our God-given responsibilities, but to release—unclench our control over the outcome and trust God to do more than "all we can ask or think."[34] It's in the practice of surrender where we find freedom and joy.

Instructions:

- Grab your Bible, notebook, pen, and take a walk outside on the beach.
- Find a spot to still your heart and contemplate the state of your own soul before God.
- Use the guide to engage your heart with God.

(Pray and send them out for 2 hours.)

Saturday Evening: Session 3, Invitation to Release in Prayer

- Reflection on the day – Conversation
- Introduction to lectio divina

    We are good at reading the Word for instruction, context, and understanding. But how well do we read for meditation, prayer, listening to God, or for life change?

    Can we truly hear the Spirit of God through the pages of Scripture? Does it matter?

34. Eph 3:20.

- Talk about trip to Italy and studying the Life of Benedict, the founder of lectio divina.

- Share more thoughts here from the book about the practice of lectio divina.

Exercise: Break into groups of 3 or 4.

Lectio format:

- Put everything down.

- Relax attentively.

- Invite the group to close their eyes, so they're listening to and speaking to God, not each other. But they are listening together, to God through each other, so invite them to silently pray their way around the circle, for each person to be able to listen to God.

(*Note to self: take time to slow down and create silent spaces)

Passage: Matthew 6:25–34

> Do Not Be Anxious
>
> "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

"Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."

First Reading: "Head"

- Direct the group to notice whatever word or phrase grabs their attention, and to stay with that.
- Read the Scripture.
- Ask the group "Now say back to God, aloud, the word or phrase that captured your attention."

Second Reading: "Heart"

- Direct the group to notice what they're feeling inside as the Scripture is read.
- Read the Scripture.
- Ask the group "Now say back to God, aloud, what you're feeling."

Third Reading: "Habit"

- Direct the group to notice how what they've been noticing might be something God is saying to them through his Word.
- Read the Scripture.
- Ask the group, "Now say back to God, aloud, what it is you think he's saying to you, something he's inviting you to do or to be."

Fourth Reading: "Hush"

- "Hush," a moment of silence—sit with it—then pray for the person on your left.
- Then, as the leader, close in a wrap-up prayer.

Sharing: Large group

- Sharing. What did you experience?
- How do you think God might want to shape your heart relationship with him through prayer this year?

Worship: Songs about trust—and releasing anxiety—fixing our eyes on Jesus.

Prayer: Take prayer requests for personal concerns and pray for each other.

Watch: "Godspeed."[35] Then conclude with rich discussion.

Sunday, September 22, 2019

- 7:00 a.m. Early risers walk and talk
- 8:30 a.m. Breakfast
- 9:30 a.m. Session #4, Reentry with God
    - Worship

35. Danny Lund, "Godspeed: The Pace of Being Known" (Chalmette, LA: The Ranch Studios, January 19, 2017), 36:53. https://www.livegodspeed.org/watchgodspeed.

    - Reflection exercise: Reentry with God

- 11:00 a.m. Refection and prayer
- Noon departure

Session 4: Reentry with God

As you prepare to head home today, take this time to prepare for your reentry.

Use your Bible and your journal to reflect on the following questions:

1. What has God said to you this weekend that seems to be clear?
2. How have you experienced a strategic withdrawal from the daily battles you face?
3. What signs has God given you while on retreat to help you remember that the encounter you have had is real?
4. Is there anything you can take with you as a token, a remembrance, of what you have experienced so that, even in the thick of life, you won't forget?
5. Is there anything you will be watching for back at home, and what will you do when you see it?

Journal Reflections and Comments

Several retreat participants shared excerpts from their journals about their experience with God at the retreat and the impact it has continued to have in their lives:

Participant #40 : February 12, 2021

The weekend of spiritual renewal and ministry preparation at the coast with Mary Ann and The River leaders was really impactful in my life. It came at the change of seasons, both literally as well as in relation to my ministry world. The summer of ministry travel was done and fall worship ministry had yet to begin. My life and days would usually be extraordinarily full for a lengthy season and then come to a sudden and temporary halt. It's always in that place that I feel a little unsettled and out of rhythm, reflecting on the past year and looking ahead at the year to come and all the unknowns. The retreat also followed a season of deep grief which landed me in a place of a lot of introspection. Questions about what I was doing with my life, about the impact I was or wasn't making for God's kingdom—was my life truly making a meaningful difference in anyone else's life? It was the perfect time for the Holy Spirit to speak deeply and personally to me.

One of those Holy Spirit moments came the first evening of our weekend together and still resonates today; it was centered around the theme of living life and relationships at "Godspeed." It's the idea of slowing down enough to truly see and know and love people, walking with each other in deep, meaningful, life-changing ways; hearing one another's stories and wading into the midst of all the circumstances and challenges with love and care and longevity. The idea stemmed from a video we watched together that evening ("Godspeed: The Pace of Being Known") and from the insights, Scripture and teaching Mary Ann shared around that theme. I was moved to tears as women opened up, one after another, about a deep longing to live that way, coupled with the knowledge that *our lives* and current culture run completely counter to that idea. Many voiced that they didn't know if it would be possible. The demands of our families, children's activities, jobs, ministries, and life's messy circumstances all feel like insurmountable hurdles to living at a slower and more intentional pace.

I think it's possible, but not without sacrifice and maybe upending our current way of living/relating to one another. Slowing way down. And if there is one thing I've noticed over the last many years of women's ministry, it's that women are busy, lonely, stressed and have a deep longing to be known. And the busy-ness we allow to invade our lives can make it very difficult to be truly known by one another.

It was around that time that I intentionally began meeting with several younger worship leaders. Besides the usual one-on-one coffee dates, I invited them collectively into my home for an evening once a month. Each time we met, one of us would have the evening to share our life-story—every part, nothing held back. And all questions were welcomed. We shared our lives and joys, burdens and even long-hidden secrets. We prayed for one another and worshiped together. It was beautiful. We felt safe and known and loved. It was life at Godspeed, if even just for one evening each month.

We need so much more of this. Depth of knowing and being known. I believe more change and Godspeed ministry will come for me in the seasons ahead. I desire to live that way for Jesus, to deeply love others with my time and presence—even when there is a deep personal cost. There is still much to process around the idea of living at Godspeed—what it really means and how it's really possible in today's culture. As I reflect back to

the start of this particular part of my journey, I'm deeply grateful for what began that Friday evening at the coast.

Participant #12: February 10, 2021

The retreat changed my prism on retreats. I viewed them as a time to get away and connect with other leaders on a more personal level as we are trained to be better leaders. What I liked about this retreat was how Mary Ann talked about it as a spiritual practice and your discussion on that. One of my favorite memories about the retreat was the time we were told to sit alone with God. We've done this before but something about being on the beach near the ocean made it so special. Doing our "assignment" and then walking on the beach, appreciating His creation and being silent, attentive to what He wanted to say to me, being intentional about listening and seeing God. A phrase I got that day that I see periodically repeated as I go through past journal entries is "Broken, yet Beautiful".

Participant #21: February 25, 2021

I am surprised by how much I have thought about this video ["Godspeed"], it has really stayed with me. I think it's because I'm a visual learner, so to have this put in a visual format has really helped me to see and be moved to pray that I could carry in my heart what it looks like to walk in Godspeed. To engage my whole self in listening to another without thinking about interjecting, just being fully present. Waiting for God to lead in his pace for the bonds in conversations to develop and build.

I can see looking back in my leadership with the women in my groups how God has been working in me. He has been guiding me to step out, to really spend time to get to know each woman. To connect by taking walks, by having phone conversations, taking time truly knowing them and their stories. This is what we all want, to be truly known. This is a process; I know in my own self there is some fear that comes from being truly known. It is a risk to step out; it takes courage; this is where God leads us in trust. We learn to share ourselves at his pace.

He has equipped me with spiritual gifts, an open heart to lead in love from a place of trusting in his timing. He has given me patience and a desire to truly know the women who I have the privilege of walking alongside, at his pace.

I will continue to carry what he has revealed to me in this video, his practices put into my walk, for his purposes.

Participant # 41 : January 16, 2022

> One of the interesting parts of the retreat in 2018 for me was practicing retreat corporately. In some ways, it really is ideal for me, as an extrovert, to learn with others about a practice that by nature involves separation from others. Although I desire to do more retreats alone, I have not yet, and I wonder if my more people-oriented nature could be part of the reason that I have not yet pursued this more actively.

Participant # 23 : February 10, 2021

> Although it seems that I am in an attitude of constant conversation with God, I wanted to go deeper. I asked Him how to do that, and I heard Him tell me, "Stop talking and listen." I smiled when I heard it, and I realized that my prayers included a lot of prattling on about myself, my concerns, how to improve my own actions and attitudes. "Stop talking and listen" was perhaps another way of His saying, "Be still and know that I am God." And so, I do have daily times of just being quiet, opening up myself to the working of the Holy Spirit. Seemingly ridiculously, "just" being still is difficult. My mind is filled with wonderings and wanderings. I pray to fight them off. I invoke the name of Jesus to protect my mind from such things, and I ask my Friend, the Holy Spirit, to help me.

Conclusion

My stated interest for this project was to ascertain the impact of spiritual formation training on women leaders in the church. The surveys and journal reflections indicate that the project was very instrumental in the spiritual growth of the participants. As leaders, they were already deeply committed to the Word of God and to prayer. They were diligent in the roles as Bible students and lay shepherds of the women they led. However, the additional training appears to have stimulated a greater passion for God and for the practices of spiritual formation that foster greater intimacy with him.

One leader wrote,

"Spiritual formation training and both of Ruth Haley Barton's books helped me change the rhythm of my life to connect with the Trinity, so that I could walk more like Christ in my daily life. By inviting stillness into my life, being quiet in His presence so I can hear His voice, ministers to my soul and to my identity."[36]

Another leader recalled,

"In reflecting on my experience as a leader in The River at River West Church, I have learned a great deal about spiritual formation. As a lay person, I had never heard of spiritual formation, per se. I have known that believers who are willing will be transformed into Christlikeness, but in common parlance, I didn't know spiritual formation is 'a thing.' I love the Lord. I have a deep curiosity about spiritual matters and a desire for spiritual growth and conformance to His will for me. Being a River leader has involved more than leading a group of women through weekly studies. Through my involvement in The River, my spiritual formation has been accelerating over the past several years . . . I learn a great deal from the leader lesson-review sessions, and I gain additional insights from the women in my group. As an added blessing, the leader group is led to a deeper place of spiritual growth."[37]

The leaders have more tools in their spiritual toolbelts now for connecting with God.

Many leaders have adopted the practices of silence and solitude for the first time.

One leader reflected,

"Silence, in particular, is something I am working to include in my life daily. I confess that I struggle here, and I find it almost laughable that this is so difficult for me. What could be so tough about spending a few minutes in silence? And yet, I find lots of ways to avoid it. I flat-out forget about doing it many days, which I find both humorous and fascinating. Why is silence difficult for me? The struggle is about fear—what will my mind, and more frighteningly, my feelings surprise me with today? It is about failure—why can I not "succeed" in being still and quiet in body *and mind* for a few minutes? It is about obedience (or lack thereof), confession ("God, I need you!"), humility ("I can't do this without you!"), and his mercy and forgiveness. Silence is teaching me about God when I show up and even when I don't. Hallelujah."[38]

Another leader is enjoying noticing God through her journaling. She wrote,

"A year ago, after our leader sessions that discussed being more intentional about noticing God, I began a journal. Let me emphasize that I've never been "a journaler," although I have long wished that I had had the discipline to capture thoughts, feelings,

36. Participant #12.
37. Participant #23.
38. Participant #41.

> activities. In fact, I have started many journals over the years, but rarely got beyond six days of writing. My latest journal (which I have stayed with daily since February 25, 2020) focuses on "God sightings," what happened each day that made me know that God was involved. This is a direct result of our sessions regarding spiritual listening and noticing God."[39]

The fruit of this spiritual formation training became more apparent when COVID hit just a few months after the retreat. In Chapter Five, I will further analyze the impact of this project in the lives of the participants and examine how their training equipped them to remain steadfast in their leadership roles when a crisis hit the church in March of 2020. I will also address future training needs for leaders as they transition into a post-COVID environment. Looking forward, I will envision possibilities for developing a leadership training infrastructure for other types of ministries within the church.

39. Participant #23.

CHAPTER FIVE

OUTCOMES AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The tales of well-known pastors and spiritual leaders who have disconnected from God and imploded in their ministries are plentiful. Whether a leader falls into sexual sin, pride, or an abuse of power, each person who fails in their role as a spiritual leader hurts the body of Christ and its witness to the world. On the other hand, what happens when spiritual leaders are deeply connected to their savior and serve the church with faithfulness and joy? How does a leader who is vibrantly growing in his or her relationship with Christ become an inspiring role model for others and a beacon of hope for the whole community in times of trouble?

The church needs faithful men and women who are thriving in their spiritual lives and using their God-given gifts to build up others. Paul's exhortation in Ephesians reminds us that the mission of the church is to help cultivate spiritual maturity in the body of Christ.[1] God has given leaders to the church, leaders who are gifted by his Spirit to help equip the believers for the work of the ministry. Spiritual leaders are not only to serve as models of spiritual maturity, but as teachers of spiritual practices as well. Spiritual leaders are called to relate intimately with Jesus as they disciple others into well-formed Christ-followers.

More specifically, women long to be mentored or discipled by other spiritually mature women. Women can thrive in communities where they are shepherded by well-formed spiritual

1. Eph 4:11–14.

leaders. Robust ministries for women can have a positive impact on the entire culture of a church. When women are gathered in community to study God's Word and to pray, they grow deep in spiritual friendship and provide loving support for one another. Male pastors have nothing to fear by hiring female pastors to shepherd their congregations. Problems that arise are not based on gender; they are based on the condition of the human heart. Every believer must guard his or her heart from the enemies of the soul and actively pursue cultivating their own heart soil for the Holy Spirit's work.

The Problem Revisited

As we've seen during the COVID-19 pandemic, ministry can be very challenging, and many pastors have walked away from their jobs. Like sheep, people are prone to wander. Over the past two years, many Christians have changed churches. Some have left because of the availability of online worship services, and others have left over disagreements with COVID protocols.

> It's impossible to analyze the topic of church-switching during the pandemic without acknowledging the backdrop of national polarization on issues ranging from masking and vaccination to racial tension to politics. Frequently, pastors have felt ill-equipped to address these issues in a way that will satisfy members representing a wide spectrum of viewpoints.[2]

In a season of stagnation where growth and momentum seem impossible, in a time with a continual stream of new COVID variants emerging, a church that is bickering over politics and COVID protocols will find itself with a revolving door of people who are constantly coming and

2. Melissa Morgan Kelly, "Christians Are Going Back to Church—But Maybe Not the Same One," *ChristianityToday.com*, January 2022. https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2022/january/church-switch-turnover-leave-covid-pandemic.html (accessed January 23, 2022).

going. That church is a church that needs leaders who are faithfully clinging to God. There is no other way for a spiritual leader to lead during a time of war than to be spiritually equipped for the battle.[3]

Times are hard for leaders in the church. However, a well-formed spiritual leader knows that she must attend to her own relationship with Jesus before trying to lead others. She knows how to abide in him, and the fruit of her life is evident, even in her suffering.[4] Others see the reality of her personal relationship with Jesus as she perseveres through life's difficulties, and they take courage in her example. She is keenly aware that *who* she is in Christ is more influential than *what* she does in ministry, and her journey of faith is contagious to those she leads. She's steadfast in the storms because she's anchored to the Rock.[5]

Women are spiritual influencers in the church, in the marketplace and in their families. They play a key role in raising their children in the faith and providing spiritual encouragement for others. Women desire relational connection in the body of Christ; in particular, they want to be seen, known, loved, prayed for, and listened to. They need a safe place to process the woes of this world with a wise and loving shepherd who can direct them to God's Word for truth and perspective.

The church needs women leaders who are deep in theological understanding, mature in dependence upon Christ, and devoted as servants in ministry. This fundamental need at River West Church is what inspired this project and informed my thesis: Training women leaders in the

3. Eph 6:10–20.
4. John 15:1–17.
5. Ps 18:2.

practices of spiritual formation will significantly deepen their relationship with God and empower them to lead others to greater spiritual maturity and faith.

Project Recap

The infrastructure of The River women's Bible study at River West Church provided an ideal training opportunity for developing leaders. Each leader is directly responsible for shepherding a group of 10–15 women throughout the course of a year. Leaders facilitate discussion, prayer, sharing, and fellowship opportunities. Because prayer is a core value of The River, the leaders know the greatest needs and deepest concerns of their group members. Because of their critical role in discipling their women, these leaders value the opportunity to be trained and better equipped for their important jobs.

In addition, The River's infrastructure brings these leaders together as a team, where they can learn from each other in community. The team is a leveraged investment for me as the pastor who cannot individually minister to so many congregants. However, by developing a team of thirty leaders, who are each shepherding fifteen group members, my pastoral reach can extend to more than 450 women.

This model of leveraged leadership was given to Moses by his father-in-law during a time when Moses had too many tasks to accomplish and too many people to meet with. Jethro wisely counseled Moses to choose capable, trustworthy, and godly leaders to oversee smaller groups of people. This allowed Moses to concentrate on his teaching and leadership, and it relieved the strain of carrying the responsibility for the whole group. This infrastructure yielded better care for the people who previously had to wait in long lines to speak to Moses but who could now

readily access a local leader who was directly responsible for their wellbeing.[6] This was a brilliant plan, inspired by God, and a useful format for the contemporary church.

It is important to note that Jethro did not advise Moses to recruit "volunteers." He told him to carefully *select* his leaders based on their godly character. "But select capable men from all the people—men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain—and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens."[7] Leaders must be *known* and *called* into their roles by someone who has observed their life and character. They are chosen and trusted.

Some of the horror stories circulating among male pastors about women in church leadership, I suspect, refer to situations in which a woman volunteered to lead a ministry in an environment where she was not well known or given proper accountability. Male pastors are often eager to thrust the care of their female congregants into the hands of women leaders who are not fully trained or equipped for the job. Passion does not equal calling. Enthusiasm is not the same as equipping.

At The River, potential leaders are recommended by their small group leader, interviewed by the pastor, and assigned to an experienced leader for a season of mentorship before being entrusted with a group of their own. This is a vital part of the process in establishing a leadership team that has been actively growing in Christlike character. This is also why ongoing spiritual formation training is vital to the success of the ministry.

6. Exod 18:13–26.
7. Exod 18:21 (New International Version).

General Project Observations

While the concept of "spiritual formation" was largely unknown by my leadership team, most of the leaders were actively pursuing spiritual growth through their participation in Bible study and their commitment to regularly pray for their group members. Whether they understood the terminology or not, they were being formed through their participation as a leader at The River. The workshops served to enlarge their understanding about the various ways they could enjoy their relationship with God, as well as the importance of spiritual disciplines as a means of spiritual growth.

At the beginning of the project, participants identified scripture meditation and prayer as their two predominant forms of engagement with God. After the project, many leaders expressed their increased attentiveness to God's presence and their ability to listen for his "still small voice".[8] Some leaders recorded their findings in journals. Others recounted their "God-sightings" to their small groups. Several leaders began their group discussions by asking, "How have you noticed God's presence this week?" The project seemed to open new avenues for enjoying God and being encouraged by his nearness.

I observed many tears flowing the night of the retreat when we viewed the "Godspeed" video together. The depiction of a life being lived at "god-speed" unearthed some deep longings for the leaders. Many of the project participants were tired and overwhelmed with the responsibilities of their lives, and the video awakened a desire to slow the pace of life and enjoy

8. 1 Kings 19:11–13 (King James Version).

being a part of a community where generations of families were deeply known. I observed in my leaders a deep desire for greater relational intimacy with God and with each other.

The leaders also had a strong positive response to Ruth Haley Barton's book, *Sacred Rhythms.*[9] Barton's message resonated deeply with the group. One participant wrote, "I loved the *Sacred Rhythms* book, and on more than one occasion, I've shared Parker Palmer's quote about the soul being like a wild animal. Although I talk to God constantly, it's never really ministered to my soul. This book and our leadership meetings helped me learn how to do that, first by making me aware I needed to do it!"[10]

In the spring of 2019, we added Barton's *Sacred Rhythms* video sessions to our workshops and practiced her spiritual formation exercises. My observation was that the leaders really enjoyed her guidance through these spiritual practices.

Overall, the project was received with warm enthusiasm. The participants joyfully embraced the exercises and were grateful for the intentional focus on the topic of spiritual formation. As noted in Chapter One, many pastors are vague in their understanding of spiritual formation and unsure about how to help their congregants develop spiritual practices.[11] My observation is that project participants were eager to grow in their faith and willing to learn and apply new practices for the purpose of tilling their heart soil and drawing near to God. Many are continuing to read books on spiritual formation and practice the things they've learned.

9. Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity, 2006).
10. Participant #12.
11. Barna, "*Most Churchgoers and Faith Leaders Struggle to Define Spiritual Maturity,"* May 11, 2009.

Observations About Project Limitations

The following are observations I've made about some potential limitations of the project.

1. Two of the project participants reported there was no change in their understanding of spiritual formation or the application of spiritual practices after completing the project. Individual circumstances may have contributed to their divergent data.

    a. Participant # 3 was a single woman in her 30s who was habitually "stuck" in her life. She often expressed unhappiness with her job, relationships, and stage of life. Though many tried to help her find a path forward, she continually refused to make the smallest steps toward change. It's not surprising that she also reported "no change" at the end of the project.

    b. Participant #7 was a middle-aged married woman with two children who was studying to be a chaplain in seminary. She reported a low degree of learning on the topic of spiritual formation compared to the high degree of learning she was experiencing in her seminary studies. She also reported "no change" to her spiritual practices, however, she explained that she had recently experienced two deaths in the family and was walking through a time of tremendous grief. She was in a self-described "survival mode" and not able to apply new learning at the time.

2. The size of the group was relatively large for a local church. Forty-one women participated in the study over the course of one year. There were six Creek leaders (children's leaders), two worship leaders, one administrative leader, and thirty-two River leaders. The size of the group was not a factor during the monthly workshops, but it was

too large to include everyone on the retreat. We were not able to find a house at the beach that would accommodate such a large meeting space, and the cost of a hotel was prohibitive. Consequently, we had to limit participation by excluding the children's leaders. Unfortunately, this meant that the Creek Leaders did not fully participate in the project.

3. The project participants did not have uniform exposure to the training from beginning to end, and that affected the statistics. Specifically, the project commenced September 2018 and was completed in September 2019; it was a robust year of ministry with many unforeseen needs and unpredictable life circumstances taking place. Five of the leaders resigned their positions at the end of the ministry year in June 2019, so they missed the fall retreat. Seven others joined the group at that time, so they had missed the previous workshops. The net effect was that only half of the leaders completed three or more of the sessions, and only an eighth had perfect attendance at all of the workshops plus the retreat. My assumption is that the results would have been measurably more favorable if attendance had been more consistent at all of the workshops including the retreat. It would have been helpful to have had a closed group of study participants who remained committed throughout the duration of the project.

Observations About Project Strengths

There are five key observations about the perceived strengths of the project:

1. The project fostered a greater opportunity for spiritual friendship and support on the leadership team. The women who attended the Saturday morning workshops enjoyed two

extra hours of time together each month to learn and pray together. Leaders were noticeably fond of each other, and close bonds were formed. Many prayers were answered during that time, and there was a spirit of great joy in the gathering space. This season of bonding was very anchoring when the COVID pandemic hit five months later.

2. The offsite retreat provided an opportunity for great fun. For example, the leaders were put into teams for a scavenger hunt and enjoyed combing the beach for treasures as they pooled their creativity to compete in the event. Later in the day, the opportunity to have alone time with God for two hours by the sea was very instrumental in their training. One leader panicked at the thought of being in solitude for such a long duration but was one of the first to express how meaningful the experience was. The strength of the retreat was evident in the spirit-filled worship, the lively conversations over meals, and the vulnerable sharing that followed the teaching times. The retreat was a highly transformative experience for our team, and it has had long lasting implications.

3. The project was instrumental in preparing the leadership team for the 2019–2020 ministry season. Leaders shared openly during the leadership meetings about their practices in spiritual formation. Registration for The River topped 500 in the fall of 2019, and the leaders were in a strong spiritual state. The growth of the ministry was met with leaders who were thriving in their personal and spiritual lives. This was observed through their personal sharing on application questions in the lesson, through prayer requests, through training sessions, and through personal dialogue. The project was successful in elevating leadership discussions to topics pertaining to spiritual formation. More conversations were centered around the leaders' relational connection with God and their discernment

of his Spirit at work in their lives than in previous years. It appears that God was working in and through the project to prepare the leadership team for the storm that was fast approaching.

4. The surveys were helpful tools for capturing numeric data and written reflections, yet measuring spiritual learning is very challenging. Personal discernment about spiritual growth is subject to the participant's evaluation of her own experience and the application of learned practices to her life. The following benefits were observed though the data collection process:

    a. It was useful to have each workshop participant capture their before-and-after perceptions of the subject matter on a scale of 0–10 and then evaluate their own growth, rather than attach meaning to the numbers themselves.

    b. The open-ended questions provided helpful clarification about each participant's perception of the numeric values they had assigned.

    c. Journal entries offered insights into the long-term learning of the participants and provided windows into their heart responses regarding their experience with the project.

5. My observation is that the project was effective and that the measurement tools were useful in assessing the impact of a spiritual experience that is, in fact, very difficult to evaluate in concrete terms.

Project Outcomes Tested by Trial

Five months after the project was completed, the global pandemic forced the church to close its doors to all in-person gatherings for the following nine months. At the time, The River was flourishing with more than 500 women deep in the study of James and 1 and 2 Peter. After the first week of closure, the leadership team was able to pivot to an online platform. Though Zoom was a new concept to most, every leader was willing to learn how to operate a virtual group and was eager to help group members maintain a close connection to God and to each other. The teaching team videotaped their weekly lessons and disseminated the videos through email, MailChimp, and a newly created YouTube channel. I created a daily devotional video called "Mornings with Mary Ann" for the encouragement of the class members as we were all walking through uncharted waters with COVID.[12] The River leaders remained steadfast in shepherding their group members amid circumstances that were constantly changing. One of the first known U.S. carriers of the COVID-19 virus was an employee of a local elementary school, sparking fear in families who lived in our community.[13] The virus was not simply halfway across the world; it also had begun to invade our community.

During this time, I observed great strength in the leadership team and a deep commitment to persevere in the study. When the ministry year ended in May 2020, the leaders persisted in gathering with their small groups throughout the summer. The leaders were wary about how

12. Mary Ann Noack, "Mornings with Mary Ann," https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCackrGIOqMG-Qv836GVlfVQ.
13. "Oregon's first coronavirus patient—Lake Oswego school custodian—released from hospital after 2 months," *Oregonian*, editorial, May 5, 2020, https://www.oregonlive.com/coronavirus/2020/05/oregons-first-coronavirus-patient-lake-oswego-school-custodian-released-from-hospital-after-2-months.html (accessed October 27, 2020).

mask-wearing and social distancing would affect the spiritual and emotional well-being of their "sheep." As a result, they persevered in God's Word and remained steadfast in prayer with their small groups during a time when they normally would detach for a summer break. When the weather was nice, they found parks and gardens in which to hold in-person gatherings. In the summer of 2020, The River leaders exhibited their well-formed relationship with Jesus in the way they persevered in their roles as leaders, and they were steadfast in shepherding our community of women through a very tumultuous time.

The storm of the pandemic, 24 months and counting, unveiled the deep maturity and Christlike character of the study participants. During the most chaotic times, the leaders remained strong yet flexible. When COVID protocols were changing week by week, the leaders were quick to adjust. They were calm and steadfast leaders because they knew how to connect with Jesus in their private lives, and they were able to draw upon his strength to hold steady in the storm. In my observation, the tools that they gleaned in their training were instrumental in helping them faithfully abide in Jesus when the whole world was filled with fear and unrest.

During the first nine months of the pandemic, when every in-person ministry in the church was closed, the women of The River were still renewing their minds on the Word of God, praying for each other's needs, enjoying virtual or outdoor community, and receiving spiritual care from their small group leader.

In the fall of 2020, The River opened with 550 participants registered for the study. New ways of communicating that began in the spring of 2020 actually stimulated growth in the

ministry, and the 2020–2021 study of the Psalms was just what the women needed. This growth likely can be attributed to the following factors:

1. The Psalms connected deeply with the reality of the present moment. The troubles, laments and praises of the psalmists resonated with our souls and gave us courage to trust in God.

2. New formats served a greater population of women. Independent study, Zoom, and socially-distanced in-person gatherings gave viable options for every person who desired to participate.

3. Online teaching extended the reach of The River to participants who lived across the United States and around the globe. One new believer joined the class from Australia and set her alarm for 3 a.m. to participate in her Zoom group.

4. The River was the only known women's Bible study in the greater Portland community that was continuing to meet during the 2020–21 pandemic season. Most churches shut down their small group gatherings, and some even dismissed their female staff to save money.

Looking Forward

Ongoing training in the spiritual practices must become a pattern for life. There is always an opportunity to go deeper in learning and in experience with God. Believers must fight against falling into rote practices that become dry and disconnected from the vibrancy of life in the Spirit.

Looking forward, I would like to craft another year of leadership workshops and retreats that focus on the practices of spiritual formation in community. The pandemic has done significant damage to our interpersonal relationships and our comfortability being in large group settings. We have become accustomed to masked faces and social distancing for far too long. We have been conditioned to view others as potential virus-carriers who are unsafe. In many ways, the pandemic has fueled our natural propensity toward autonomy and individualism. In the future, I would like to examine how we might practice the spiritual disciplines in community. I see this as one of our greatest needs in a post-pandemic season.

Each of the spiritual practices that Jesus employed can and should be enjoyed in community within the body of Christ. Leaders can learn to practice corporate prayer and public Bible reading as preparations for worship. Lectio divina, visio divina (seeing God through the visual arts), and retreat can be enjoyed in the company of others. Listening exercises can help leaders hear and notice each other's needs. As I look ahead with hope to a post-pandemic ministry season, I'd like to help women leaders grow together in the "communal practices" of spiritual formation. My goal is to teach others how to craft a rule of life that will revitalize their personal faith as well as their corporate engagements within the body of Christ.[14]

Developing infrastructure for the equipping of spiritual leaders is a desperate need in the church. Too many volunteers are slotted into places of service without proper training or accountability. Two ministries at River West Church that would benefit greatly from this project are the community group ministry and the men's ministry.

14. Stephen A. Macchia, *Crafting a Rule of Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012).

Community group leaders were hit hard during the pandemic, and most of them left their places of service. Without an infrastructure for spiritual equipping, theological training, problem solving and accountability, they were unprepared to navigate the divisive issues that hit the church in 2020. Community group leaders would benefit from a monthly meeting that provided connection and resources for their roles.

The River West Men's ministry would also benefit from a devoted training time for leaders. A pastor has recently stepped into this role full-time and is working to develop new small group leaders as he prepares to expand the ministry. In the fall of 2022, we are hoping to launch a co-ed River class. This will provide an opportunity for the men's ministry leaders to participate with the women's ministry leaders in a devoted times of training and equipping.

Looking into the near future, we must consider asking for more time commitment from leaders in all areas of church ministry to facilitate a leadership community where deeper relationships are formed, and men and women can both receive training in leadership skills and in spiritual formation. My hope is that this model of selecting leaders and developing them into fully formed Christ-followers will have a significant impact on the spiritual health and well-being of River West Church.

Conclusions

Measuring the impact of spiritual formation training is very challenging. In fact, what happens in the innermost part of a person's soul and their relationship with Jesus may be impossible to quantify. However, more of this project's benefit was revealed than probably would have been discovered in a normal ministry season thanks to the suffering from the global

pandemic and the impact that it had on the church community. The project participants held steady in the storm. They leaned into their calling and went beyond their job description to shepherd their women in meaningful ways. The leaders rejoiced in their friendships with one another and practiced the spiritual disciplines that they learned in the project to tether themselves to Jesus during a hard time.

One participant wrote,

> "As I drew nearer to Jesus, I was calmer in spirit and able to extend the peace He gave me to my ladies. I was better equipped to minister to them because our great Source had ministered to me first. Continuing this practice allows me to be able to minister to those God places in my path and to encourage them to breathe in Christ's peace, be empowered by His Spirit and be still with God so that He can minister to their souls."[15]

The project confirmed my thesis hypothesis that spiritual formation training for leaders in the church will lead to greater faith and maturity, and well-formed spiritual leaders will have a significant impact on those they lead. The whole community is affected when a spiritual leader is leading from the overflow of her abiding life with Jesus.

Ultimately, the purpose of spiritual formation is to become more like Christ. In Chapter Two, we defined spiritual formation as the movement of the Holy Spirit upon a responsive human heart, that awakens a person to the activities of God, who is at work to transform believers into the likeness of His Son, Jesus Christ. When we engage with the practices of spiritual formation, we are giving the Holy Spirit access to our souls with permission to shape our truest self into the person God created us to be.

15. Participant #12.

Leaders are influencers for the gospel in the kingdom of God. It is critical for leaders to be diligent in watching over their heart soil lest the enemies of the soul prevail in leading a servant away from fruitful obedience and into a season of barrenness and drought. Leaders who intentionally prepare the soil of their hearts to hear the Word of God and to respond to the Holy Spirit's divine activity will be transformed into mature Christ-followers who are ready and eager to lead others into spiritual maturity and faith.

The best way a leader can become more like Jesus is to follow his example. Jesus modeled a spiritual rhythm of life practices. He withdrew to desolate places to be alone and pray.[16] He spoke candidly with his Father in prayer and brought the fullness of his emotions to the throne of grace.[17] Jesus fasted from food when he was tempted by sin and experienced strength in his spirit to resist the schemes of the devil. He knew the scriptures intimately,[18] lived them out in perfect obedience[19] and taught them boldly to others.[20] Jesus developed deep spiritual friendships with his disciples and called many lost and hurting people to follow him. He was a model of love, humility, and service.[21]

If leaders are not fully awake to the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives, they may be lulled into spiritual sleep. The world, the flesh, and the devil are conspiring to rock spiritual influencers into a state of lethargy, making their effectiveness for the Gospel impotent. Too many highly influential pastors have let down their guards and slipped into arrogance and

16. Luke 5:16.
17. Heb 5:7.
18. Luke 24:45–47.
19. Luke 22:42.
20. John 10:22–38.
21. John 13:1–5.

apathy, opening the door to catastrophic errors in judgment. Leaders must persevere in a rhythm of life with Christ that protects against a hard and crusty heart (soil). They must intentionally disciple themselves in the areas of spiritual formation to enjoy a vibrant, intimate relationship with God.

What is the impact of spiritual formation training on women leaders of the church? They become like the fragrant aroma of Christ in a world that is perishing and desperate to be saved.

> For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing: to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life.[22]

22. 2 Cor 2:15–16 (New American Standard Bible).

APPENDIX A

COMPARING POSITIONS ON WOMEN IN MINISTRY

The following table is an attempt to show the similarities and differences of the three positions in brief form. The statements are typical and do not necessarily represent the views of everyone who might fall into each particular category. Reference should be made to the longer statement of positions that follows the table.

Authoritarian or patriarchal is a view to the right of these three can be summarized as "Women should always function under male authority and be in submission in the God-ordained authority structure that is central to Christian life" Bill Gothard is a long-time advocate. Christian Feminism, a view to the left of these three, can be summarized as "Women have been an oppressed group for too long. As Christians, we must follow the example of God in the Exodus and liberate oppressed people. We must make up for wrongs of the male-dominated past. We must promote women at every opportunity."

COMPARISON	EGALITARIAN	MALE ELDER COMPLEMENTARIAN	MALE LEADER COMPLEMENTARIAN
Definitional phrase	Men and women are partners together everywhere in life. All ministries and offices of the church are equally open to all qualified men and women. Gender is not a relevant distinction for excluding a person from any office.	Women are encouraged to minister in any office or ministry open to any other non-elder, assuming their qualifications and appropriate gifting. The office of elder is reserved for men.	Women have important ministry to women and children. They should not exercise any ministry that includes public teaching to the corporate body or the exercising of authority over men.
Hierarchy in creation Gen. 1 & 2	None. Full equality at creation.	Equal in essence with hints of male leadership in the complementary partnership of marriage.	Equal in essence with hierarchical roles. Male headship defined as a pattern of life.
Effect of Fall Gen. 3	Created illegitimate hier-archical system. Man becomes ruler because of sin.	Woman's desire is for oneness with her husband (cf. Gen. 2:23-24). Husband's rule instituted which lasts as long as it hurts to have babies. "Desire" and "rule" may be positive or negative.	Painful distortion of creation hierarchy. Woman's desire is to overthrow God's pattern of male headship. Men exercise legitimate authority in domineering way.
Restoration in Christ	Abolished hierarchy as redemption is achieved.	Christlike roles in ordered relationship.	Proper creational role relationships restored.

1 Cor. 11	Shows women active in ministry in the local church but must use freedom in Christ properly.	Shows women active in ministry in the local church but must use freedom in Christ properly. Male headship is tied to Genesis 2 & 3.	Shows pattern of male headship in creation as defined in Gen. 2. Does not apply to ministry in the assembly of the church.
1 Cor. 14	Paul bans disruptive speech.	Women are to be silent in the judging of prophecies, a role for elders only.	Women are to be silent in the assembly of the church.
Gal. 3:28	Magna Carta of freedom. No gender distinctions in ministry.	No gender distinctions in salvation.	No gender distinctions in salvation.
1 Tim. 2:11–15	Corrects a first century problem in Ephesus and is not universally normative.	Limits women from elder-ship and the elder-exclusive roles as defined by a local church.	Limits women from teaching men at any time or having any authority over men.
Biblical Offices	All offices including senior pastor open to qualified women and men.	Elder office and functions for qualified men only; deacon office open to qualified women and men.	Both elder and deacon offices closed to women.
Gifts	All gifts given apart from gender distinctions.	All gifts given apart from gender distinctions. Used in biblically appropriate roles and offices.	All gifts given apart from gender distinc-tions. The gifted persons of Eph. 4:11 are males only.
Ministry	All ministries open to qualified women and men.	All non-elder ministries open to qualified women and men.	All ministries involving authority over or teaching men reserved for men.
Some Proponents	Millard Erickson, Gordon Fee, Stan Grenz, Walt Kaiser, Roger Nicole, Mimi Haddad, *Christians for Biblical Equality*	Tim Keller, Mark Driscoll, Craig Blomberg, Rick McKinley, Gerry Breshears, some at *Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*	John MacArthur, Bruce Ware, John Piper, Beth Moore, many at *Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*

APPENDIX B

LEADERSHIP WORKSHOP SCHEDULE

Date	Training Focus	Participants
Sat., September 15, 2018 8 a.m.–noon	• Intro to Spiritual Formation • The Art of Listening	River + Creek Leaders
Sat., October 13, 2018 8 a.m.–10 a.m.	• Lectio Divina – Praying God's Word • Spiritual Formation Survey	River + Scouts + Creek + ALL
Fri., November 16, 2018 9 a.m.–noon	Revive Leadership Conference	Open – All Leaders
Sat., December 8, 2018 8 a.m.–10 a.m.	River Leadership Christmas Fellowship	River + Creek Leaders
Sat., January 13, 2019 8 a.m.–10 a.m.	Developing Spiritual Practices	River + Scouts/Creek Leaders + ALL
Fri.–Sat., February 8–9, 2019 All day	If:Gathering Weekend	Open – All Leaders
Sat., March 9, 2019 8 a.m.–10 a.m.	Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership #4	River + Creek Leaders
Sat., April 13, 2019 8 a.m.–10 a.m.	Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership #5	Open – All Leaders
Sat., May 11, 2019 8 a.m.–10 a.m.	Celebration Fellowship	River + Creek Leaders

APPENDIX C

PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

PARTICIPANT	LEADER	AGE	MARITAL
#1	RIVER p.m.	60s	M
#2	RIVER p.m.	60s	M
#3	WORSHIP	30s	S
#4	RIVER a.m.	50s	M
#5	RIVER a.m.	40s	M
#6	RIVER a.m.	40s	M
#7	RIVER p.m.	50s	M
#8	RIVER p.m.	50s	M
#9	RIVER p.m.	50s	M
#10	RIVER a.m.	30s	M

#11	RIVER a.m.	60s	M
#12	RIVER a.m.	50s	M
#13	CREEK	50s	M
#14	CREEK	40s	M
#15	RIVER a.m.	30s	M
#16	RIVER a.m.	30s	M
#17	CREEK	70s	M
#18	RIVER a.m.	50s	M
#19	RIVER p.m.	50s	M
#20	RIVER a.m.	70s	S
#21	RIVER a.m.	60s	M
#22	RIVER a.m.	60s	M
#23	RIVER a.m.	60s	M

#24	RIVER a.m.	60s	M
#25	RIVER a.m.	50s	M
#26	RIVER a.m.	40s	M
#27	RIVER p.m.	40s	M
#28	RIVER a.m.	40s	M
#29	ADMIN	50s	M
#30	RIVER a.m.	40s	M
#31	RIVER a.m.	60s	M
#32	RIVER a.m.	40s	M
#33	RIVER a.m.	30s	M
#34	RIVER a.m.	30s	M
#35	CREEK	70s	W
#36	CREEK	40s	M

#37	RIVER p.m.	60s	W
#38	RIVER a.m.	40s	M
#39	CREEK	60s	W
#40	WORSHIP	50s	M
#41	RIVER p.m.	50s	M

APPENDIX D

WORKSHOP #1 SURVEY SAMPLE

Spiritual Formation Leader's Survey #1: September 15, 2018

Name: _____

Part One: Spiritual Formation

1. What is Spiritual Formation? (In your own words)

2. How well do you understand Spiritual Formation? _____ Using a scale 0–10 (0 = no understanding) (10 = excellent understanding)

3. What Spiritual Formation practices do you regularly engage in?

Part Two: Listening

4. Explain "Listening"

5. Describe "Being Heard"

6. How do you practice listening to God?

7. How often do you practice listening to God? _____ Using a scale 0–10. (0 = never, 10 = several times a day)

APPENDIX E

WORKSHOP #1 SURVEY RESULTS

Participant No.	Q2	Q3	Q7
#1	3.5	Prayer, Scripture Reading	2
#2	8	Prayer, Scripture Reading	4
#3	4	Prayer, Bible, Spiritual Friendships	3
#4	5	Prayer, Bible Study, Silence, Meditation	n/a
#5	5	Prayer, Bible Reading	5
#6	7	Bible Reading, Prayer	7.5
#7	7	Prayer, Bible Study, Silence, Meditation, Worship,	9
#8	0	Bible Reading, Spiritual Friendships, Learning	2.5
#9	4	Bible Reading, Learning, Prayer	7
#10	1.5	Bible Reading, Prayer, Serving, Discipleship, Confession	7
#11	0	n/a	10
#12	0	Listening, Quiet Time	10
#13	3	Prayer, Bible Study, Worship, Evangelism	8
#14	7	Prayer	10
#15	3	Prayer, Listening, Bible Study, Worship	5
#16	4.5	Prayer, Meditation, Bible Study	6
#17	4	Scripture Reading, Prayer	3
#18	5	Bible Study, Prayer, Worship, Friendship	8.5
#19	3	Bible Study, Learning, Church Attendance	9.5
#20	4	Quiet time, Bible Reading, Prayer	2
#21	5	Prayer	6
#22	6	Bible Study, Prayer, Fellowship, Learning	7
#23	0	Reading, Bible Mediation, Writing, Research	10
#24	7	Bible Study, Prayer, Church	7
#25	0	I don’t know	2
#26	2	Bible Study, Solitude, Worship	3.5
#27	0	Bible Study, Prayer, Church Attendance,	n/a
#28	7	Prayer, Bible Reading, Listening	9
#29	4	Prayer, Noticing	3.5
#30	7	Meditation, Prayer, Solitude, Silence	10
	3.78		6.3

APPENDIX F

WORKSHOP #2 SURVEY SAMPLE

Spiritual Formation Leader's Survey #2: October 13, 2018

Name: _____

Part One: Spiritual Formation

1. What is Spiritual Formation? (In your own words)

2. How well do you understand Spiritual Formation? _____ (Using a scale 0–10 (0 = no understanding) (10 = excellent understanding)

3. What Spiritual Formation practices do you regularly engage in?

Part Two: Lectio Divina

1. What is your understanding of Lectio Divina? _____ (Using a scale 0–10 (0 = no understanding) (10 = excellent understanding)

2. What is Lectio Divina? (Describe in your own words.)

3. Have you ever engaged in the practice of Lectio Divina? (If so, please describe.)

4. Do you practice Lectio Divina on a regular basis? (Describe.)

APPENDIX G

LECTIO DIVINA HANDOUT

Leadership Enrichment Workshop: October 13, 2018

"For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12)

"The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express." (Romans 8:26)

Become attentive. Let go of distractions. Be present to God, in Christ.

First reading: Head. What does the Holy Spirit draw your attention to – what word or phrase resonates? Notice it and pray it back to God.

Second reading: Heart. What is going on inside you as you sit with whatever you noticed? What are you feeling as the Holy Spirit stirs God's word deep into your soul? Notice it and talk with God about it.

Third reading: Habit (from Latin "habitus," character). How might whatever you're noticing reflect what the Holy Spirit is praying in you and for you? What is God calling you to, in being or in doing?

Rest. Rest in God's arms, "like a weaned child with its mother" (Psalm 131:2), enjoying his loving embrace.

APPENDIX H

WORKSHOP #2 SURVEY RESULTS

Participant No.	Survey #2	SF-Q2	LD-Q2	LD-Q3	LD-Q4
#1	X	5		Yes	No
#2	X	6		Pray Scripture	Pray Psalms
#3	X	4		Pray scripture	Read Scripture
#4	X	5	n/a	n/a	n/a
#5					
#6	X	8		No	No
#7	X	7		Pray Scripture	No
#8	X	5		Listen to God	During Bible Study
#9	X	6.5			
#10					
#11	X	1	n/a	n/a	n/a
#12	X	8	n/a	maybe?	don't know
#13	X	4	n/a	n/a	n/a
#14					
#15	X	6	Praying	Praying for others?	n/a
#16	X	n/a	not sure	not sure	not sure
#17	X	1	?	?	?
#18	X	8	n/a	n/a	n/a
#19	X	6	n/a	n/a	n/a
#20					
#21					
#22	X	6			
#23					
#24					
#25					
#26					
#27					
#28					
#29					
#30	X	8		Yes	Sometimes
#31	X	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
#32	X	5		n/a	n/a
#33	X	5		Pray Scripture?	No
#34	X	2	unsure	unsure	No
#35	X	5	unsure	Unsure	Prayer Journal?
#36	X	8	don't know	don't know	n/a
#37	X	0	n/a	n/a	n/a
#38	X	7		yes	not yet
		5.5			

APPENDIX I

WORKSHOP #3 SURVEY SAMPLE

Spiritual Formation Leader's Survey #3: May 11, 2019

Name: _____

Part One: Spiritual Formation

1. What is Spiritual Formation? (In your own words)

Part Two: Spiritual Practices

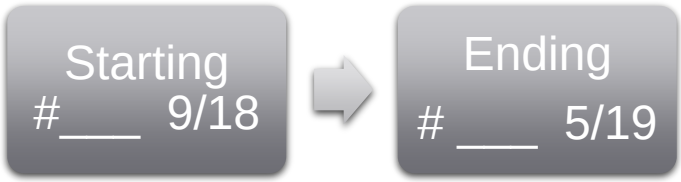
2. I have developed a rhythm of spiritual practices this year: True or False? (Circle)

    - If TRUE, please describe which practices you have employed and how you have grown as a result of the Leadership Equipping Workshops. (See following examples)

        - Listening to God
        - Noticing Him
        - Lectio divina – Word as Prayer
        - Prayer
        - Attending to your soul
        - Solitude with God
        - Living with limits
        - Other practices or points of learning

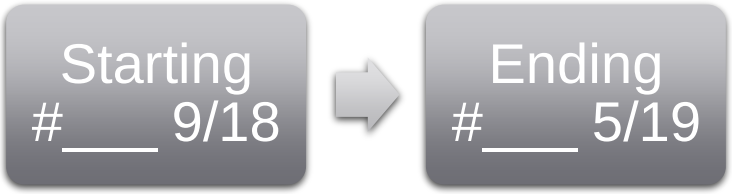
    - If FALSE, what has hindered your growth or participation in these spiritual practices?

Overall, how would you assess the development of your <u>understanding</u> of Spiritual Formation this year? Use a number scale (0 = no understanding, 10 = excellent understanding)



How would you rate the change in your <u>participation</u> with spiritual practices this year as a result of the Leadership Equipping Workshops?

Use a number scale: (0 = no change, 10 = complete change)



What spiritual practices would you like to explore in the Leadership Equipping Workshops next year?

APPENDIX J

WORKSHOP #3 SURVEY RESULTS

Participant No.	Survey #3	Q2	TRUE - ?	FALSE ?	Q5	Q6
#1	X	T	Listening, Lectio, Prayer		4 to 8	1 to 5
#2		T	Lectio, Soul Care, Solitude		3 to 7	3 to 8
#3	X	F		Forgetfulness, Busyness	0 to 6	0 to 0
#4	X	T	Listening, Noticing, Prayer, solitude		2 to 5	3 to 6
#5	X	T	Listening, Noticing, Prayer, Soul Care, Solitude, Limits, Memorization		?	? To 7
#6	X	T	Listening, Noticing, Soul Care, Solitude, Limits		6 to 8	7 to 9
#7	X	F		Already had spiritual practic	N/c	N/c
#8						
#9	X	T	Listening, Noticing, Lectio, Prayer, Soul Care, Solitude		4 to 6.5	4 to 8
#10	X	T	Listening, Noticing, Lectio, Solitude		2 to 5	5 to 7
#11						
#12						
#13						
#14						
#15	X	T	Listening, Noticiing, Soul Care, Limits		2 to 6	5 to 7
#16	X	T	Listening, Noticing, Prayer, Solitude		2 to 6	5 to 6
#17						
#18	X	T	Listening, Noticing, Prayer, Solitude		6 to 8	5 to 8
#19						
#20	X	T	Listening, Noticing, Lectio, Prayer, Soul Care, Solitude, Limits,		4 to 8	3 to 9
#21	X	T	Listening, Noticing, Lectio, Prayer, Soul Care, Solitude, Limits,		3 to 8	?
#22		T	Listening, Noticing, Prayer, Soul Care, Solitude		1 to 5	0 to 5
#23	X	T	Listening, Noticing, Prayer, Solitude,		1 to 5	3 to 7
#24	X	T	Listening, Noticing, Prayer		3 to 6	3 to 7
#25						
#26	X	T	Listening, Prayer, Solitude,		1 to 3`	5 to 5
#27	X	T	Soul Care, Living with Limits		7 to 9	5 to 6
#28						
#29	X	T	Listening, Noticing, Prayer, Limits		5 to 8	3 to 6
#30						
#31						
#32						
#33						
#34						
#35	X	T	Listening, Noticing, Prayer, Soul Care, Solitude, Limits, Memorization		6 to 8	6 to 8
#36						
#37						
#38	X	T	Soul Care		5 to 7	7 to 8
#39	X	T	Listening, Noticing, Prayer, Solitude		4 to 8	3 to 8
	21					

APPENDIX K

WORKSHOP #3 SPIRITUAL PRACTICES SCHEDULE

Spiritual Practices for Leaders Workshop: January 12, 2019

8:00 a.m. Food and Fellowship
8:15 a.m. Opening Prayer
8:20 a.m. Introduction to Spiritual Formation

- The Problem:
    - Review the state of our world today and the stats from LifeWay.
    - We don't drift into spiritual maturity and godliness – we must choose to abide with Christ and intentionally incorporate spiritual practices that keep us close to Him
    - D.A. Carson on being prone to drift
    - Why then are SP important? Statement and hindering forces: World, flesh devil
        - Readers: Romans 1:28–32 (W)
        - Readers: 1 Timothy 4:12–16 (F)
        - Readers: Ephesians 6:10–18 (D)
- The Movement of Spiritual Formation:
    - Renewed popularity
    - Cautions about just seeking a spiritual experience
    - What is Christian Spiritual Formation

8:40 a.m. BREAKOUT

- My Definition:
    - Discuss Parts of definition. (Print 7 cards with phrases and scripture and have small groups discuss words and offer an explanation.) Then I will share my definition.

8:55 a.m. DISCUSS
9:15 a.m. BREAKOUT

- Spiritual Practices of Jesus.
    - Break into groups – give bible verses and topics. Have groups observe Jesus' practices in these areas and share with the larger group.

9:30 a.m. DISCUSS
9:45 a.m. CONCLUSION AND PRAYER:

- Tie into River Message about small acts of faith producing Big results.

- This is true of spiritual practices in our lives. Small daily acts of faith produce heart soil that is ripe for sowing seeds and producing a spiritual harvest. This is your life with God.
- Share my story of life transformation through the practices of studying the Word, prayer, worship, service, etc.
- This is the mission of The River – Grow in knowledge of God's word – apply truth of scripture to one's life – provide opportunity for lasting friendships. This is spiritual growth and maturity on an individual level and a community level. WE + Jesus = US, – The Church.
- Spiritual practices lead us to the abundant life we crave – a life that is daily abiding in Jesus. John 10:10

Discuss: What hinders you from spending concentrated time with the Lord?

Share and pray in small groups.

10:00 a.m. END

Truth: Enjoying Jesus in the small daily practices of life gives rest to our souls and joy to our hearts! (Rest and Joy! Two of my favorite life experiences)

APPENDIX L

INTERACTIVE RETREAT PIECES

BEDTIME

Let the act of crawling into bed and laying your head on the pillow become an exercise in trusting your whole self – body and soul – to God. As you pull up the covers over yourself, imagine God is putting His arms around you, holding you, covering you with His love. Feel the tiredness of your body and enjoy how good it feels to lie there, invited by God to relax and rest. If cares and concerns surface, trust these to God even as you trust yourself to God. If you wake up in the night, don't fight your wakefulness; just allow yourself to become aware that you are with God and God is with you, looking on you with love as you rest. In this way, you are still resting your soul even as your body is awake.

RETREAT

- **A RHYTHM of life in Christ**
- **To REPLENISH our bodies, minds and souls**
- **Enabling us to RECOGNIZE and RESPOND to God's Presence**
- **In order to RECALIBRATE our lives based on God's discernment**
- **Allowing us to REENGAGE from a more REFRESHED place**
- **Establishing more REGULAR patterns of RETURNING and RESTING IN GOD**

A DAY IN THE LIFE

The first thing I do each morning_____.

Breakfast consists of _____.

If I have 30 minutes to myself I _____.

I love to wear _____.

The household chore I dread most is _____.

My favorite place to get lunch _____.

My favorite thing to do outdoors is_____.

My 3 favorite smells are _____.

I never miss an episode of _____.

I like to get to bed at _____PM.

Before I fall asleep, I like to_____.

Team Scavenger Hunt

- ☐ Decide on a name for your team and write it in the sand. (Photo)
- ☐ Make up a team slogan and choreograph a team cheer. (Video)
- ☐ Make a sandcastle. (Photo)
- ☐ Find a whole crab on the beach. (Photo)
- ☐ Video at least two people on your team wading into the water.
- ☐ Find a house with a colorful front door. (Photo)
- ☐ Bring back three shells of the same kind.
- ☐ Find a creature's home. (Photo)
- ☐ Touch something slimy as a team. (Photo)
- ☐ Find some litter and throw it away (Photo)
- ☐ Take a photo of a boat.
- ☐ Make something silly out of driftwood. (Photo)
- ☐ Spell a word with your bodies on the sand. (Photo)
- ☐ Choose your favorite Bible Verse and say it by memory as a team. (Video)

APPENDIX M

REENTRY WITH GOD ON RETREAT

As you prepare to head home today, take this time to prepare for your reentry.
Use your Bible and your journal to reflect on the following questions:

1. What has God said to you this weekend that seems to be clear?
2. How have you experienced a strategic withdrawal from the daily battles you face?
3. What signs has God given you while on retreat to help you remember that the encounter you have had is real?
4. Is there anything you can take with you as a token, a remembrance, of what you have experienced so that even in the thick of life you won't forget?
5. Is there anything you will be watching for back at home, and what will you do when you see it?

Oh God of peace,
who has taught us that in returning and rest
we shall be saved,
in quietness and trust shall be our strength;
By the power of your Holy Spirit
quiet our hearts we pray,
that we may be still and know that you are God,
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen

The Book of Common Prayer

APPENDIX N

WORKSHOP #4 STRENGTHENING THE SOUL FOR LEADERS A

March 9, 2019

Recount the Journey:

- Focus: The Spiritual Growth of the Leader – My personal passion. (WCC)
    - How can we become fully formed Christ followers who are so enlivened in our own relationship with God that our faith becomes contagious within our community?
    - Leaders (Parents. Believers. Friends. Co-workers) are models – calling others to come along and follow us into spiritual maturity as we seek to follow Jesus.
- Review:
    - September – "The Art of Listening." Learning to stop the noise of our lives to listen to God and to notice His presence in and around us. We practiced listening to each other – being present with each other's stories. When we mature in Christ – we become more aware of God and more attentive to the needs of others. We become better equipped to go into the world ready to minister as His instruments wherever He calls us.
    - October – We learned how to pray God's Word through an ancient practice called lectio divina. Meditation on scripture is a powerful way to create space in souls for God to speak His word into our hearts.
        - Four steps include:
            - Lectio – (Head) – Listening
            - Meditatio – (Heart) – Meditation – Mulling over

        - Oratio – Praying to God about it (Habit)
        - Contemplatio – Contemplating – Resting (Hush)
    - November – We invited you to attend the Revive Conference and connect with other leaders in our community
    - December – We enjoyed a fun Christmas fellowship and gift exchange – rocked the church with laughter (Pastor Adam)
    - January – We did a deep dive into the meaning of Spiritual Formation. We discussed what the definition means and looked at many examples of spiritual practices in Jesus' earthly life. We also talked about the importance of developing spiritual practices in our daily routines that foster intimacy with the Lord and provide the abundant life that is only possible when we abide with Jesus.
    - March and April – Focusing on the book *Strengthening the Soul of Your leadership*.
        - Examining the state of our souls – IOW – Pause – breathe – pay attention to how we're doing with the Lord in our inner being. (Moving from learning to experiencing)
        - The leadership examples that RHB uses are all from the life of Moses – so it will be doubly meaningful for us to examine our own hearts, as we are also deep in the study of Moses and his relationship with God.
        - I'm going to share a few thoughts – we will take a soul assessment together – and have a discussion about we are doing.

Teaching and Application:

- Part One: Strengthening Our Souls – Introduction

- **Your soul is the part of you that is most real.** It's the essence of you that God knew before you were formed in your mother's womb; it's the part of you that will live eternally.
- Your soul is YOU. It's the part of you that aches for God. It's also the part of you that can become dulled/crusty or lost toward Him.
- As leaders – we can either lead in the radiant glory of God (like a human tabernacle radiating the Shekinah glory – or we can do perfunctory tasks in our human effort). Neither of these conditions have anything to do with our salvation – but only about whether we are spiritually enlivened (renewed – filled) by His spirit as we engage in life and ministry.
- Danger – you can lose your zeal without realizing it when you are so busy in the rhythm of ministry and service.
    - Like losing a credit card – you think it's in your wallet, so you don't give much thought to it until one day you reach for it, and it's not there. Then we panic – right – where did we leave it? How can we find it? Has any corruption or identity theft happened? *"Oh, may we feel the same sense of urgency when we become aware that we have lost our souls."*
- The opportunity to lead is a gift/privilege from the Lord. It's an invitation to grow at an accelerated pace in your gifts and dependence upon the Lord. Leadership is meant to transform us as we are called beyond our abilities and resources into places where we are desperate for God. The most potent leader is the most engaged follower, a person who is actively being transformed by God's Spirit right in the midst of leading.

- Discuss – AT TABLES: How do you respond to the definition of SOUL, that it's the part of you that is most real? Do you typically think of your soul that way? How might it change your priorities if you did?
- Part Two: When Leader's Lose their Souls – Chapter 1
    - Ruth's confession: "I'm tired of helping other people enjoy God; I just want to enjoy God for myself." Have you ever felt this way?
    - This is a good indicator that the inflow of your spiritual life is not keeping pace with the outflow of your ministry and service. It's a warning light on the dashboard that requires immediate attention. (Many people normalize this dichotomy after a period of time and either burn out of ministry or fall into terrible sin.)
    - One of the most important questions for us to ask ourselves and each other: how is your soul?
    - (Exercise of journaling this question regularly through my D.Min. program. To lose my soul studying about SF would be a great tragedy – thankfully, the things I am studying I am also applying and being deepened. God is so good.)
    - **How do we find God in the context of our leadership instead of missing Him? What are some ways you stay connected to God? (Discuss, then talk through my list below)**
        - Bible study – fills us with His Word
        - Fellowship – builds community
        - Prayer – keeps us dependent and tethered
        - Me: time constraints/new experiences, magnitude of the task keeps me desperate

- **What does it look like for us to lead out of our own soul connection with God rather than from our own designs? (Discuss)**
- Quote on page 26: there is a tension between human soul needs and the requirement of leadership. READ.
- Leadership provokes us to be **desperate** for God. Calls us out of our comfort zone and wakes us up to full dependence on Him for any spiritual fruitfulness.
- READ about Moses' relationship with God on page 30.
- Our souls are strengthened in times of solitude with God. This necessitates that we pull away from our busy lives to allow our souls to be with God—undistracted—non-anxious—listening—praying—resting in Him.

- DISCUSS/PERSONAL RELFECTION – When have you experienced "loss of soul" or something not quite right at the soul level? Maybe you are there right now. What do you find your soul needing or wanting to say to God?

- <u>Lectio divina: (Psalm 63:1–8)</u>
  - Pray a lectio divina here to prepare our hearts – all meditation is quiet and personal reflection – not out loud.

    Lectio format:

    Put everything down (except the leader has this printed page and the reading).

    Relax attentively.

    Invite the group to close their eyes, so they're listening to and speaking to God, not each other. But they are listening together, to God through each other, so

invite them to silently pray their way around the circle, for each person to be able to listen to God.

First reading: "Head"

Direct the group to notice whatever word or phrase grabs their attention, and to stay with that.

Read the Scripture.

Ask the group, "Now say back to God, aloud, the word or phrase that captured your attention."

Second reading: "Heart"

Direct the group to notice what they're feeling inside as the Scripture is read.

Read the Scripture.

Ask the group, "Now say back to God, aloud, what you're feeling." (One word)

Third reading: "Habit"

Direct the group to notice how what they've been noticing might be something God is saying to them through his Word.

Read the Scripture.

Ask the group, "Now say back to God, aloud, what it is you think he's saying to you, something he's inviting you to do or to be."

"Hush" – A moment of silence – sit with it – then pray for the person on your left.

Then as the leader, close in a wrap-up prayer.

Reflection:

Sharing? What did you experience?

- DO: The "How is my soul assessment?" – Discuss what stood out to you.

Assignment:

- Find 2 hours to spend alone with the Lord over the next month. Be attentive to your soul. Seek refreshment in him alone.
- Read Chapter 7 "Living Within Limits" and 8 "Spiritual Rhythms in the Life of a Leader" between now and our next meeting on April 13.

Announcements:

- Next year's study
- Mark your calendars for a leadership retreat: September 6–8
- All church women's retreat February 14–16 Cannon Beach Conference Center.

Summer Study

- Questions – Comments – Reflections?

APPENDIX O

WORKSHOP #5 STRENGTHENING THE SOUL FOR LEADERS B

April 12, 2019

8:00 a.m. Breakfast and fellowship

8:15 a.m. Prayer and welcome

8:20 a.m. Review – Last month's assignment was to spend 2 hours alone with the Lord and pay attention to the state of your soul. Feedback? Anyone find refreshment?

8:25 a.m. Conversation #1 – Living Within Limits

- Exodus 18:15–18, read
- Moses had a huge task to lead the Israelites to the Promised Land. It was a God-sized calling that needed God's empowering and equipping. Still, Moses needed help. There were limits to his human resources.
- Jethro wisely counseled Moses to share the load of leadership with his community.
- This is the model we follow here. Beyond the benefit of studying God's Word together the structure of The River provides a means to shepherd women in small groups.
- We have hundreds of women in our community of all different ages and stages of spiritual life. No single person can shepherd so many women. But in small groups, you have the opportunity to know, pray for, and encourage a group of 10–15 women in their faith. This structure enables us to spiritually support and walk alongside hundreds of

women at once. There are 400 women in The River. It's a beautiful forum to minister God's Word to a large community of women – but it takes each one of us doing our part.

- And like Moses, we can become dangerously depleted because it's a heavy task to lead and shepherd others. We're engaged in the depths of people's pain and struggles. We help shoulder their loads in prayer – and we grow to love and care for each person. It's costly to care. It's personal. It's an investment of time to prepare to lead your groups, teach the children, and be open and vulnerable with each other in your own journey with God in faith.
- So, it matters that we watch over our souls and guard our hearts from callousness or disconnection from God – after all, he is the source of our lives and the reason for everything we do.
- On page 104–105 RHB highlights some symptoms that indicate when a leader is in a state of depletion.
- ACTIVITY: In small groups – will you look over this list and share with each other which of these symptoms most resonate with you. (I will join a table.) (10 mins.)

8:40 a.m. Large group sharing: Reflect together

8:45 a.m. Summarize: Learning to Live Within Limits

- Because we are human – we are limited physically by time, space, strength, and energy. We're also limited by our personalities. When we realize our limitations, we diffuse the notion of grandiosity – that sense that we are superhuman and can soar above our human capacities without being burned.
- Read prayer on page 110.
- Living within limits honors the deepest reality of the life God has given to us.

- How or where is the Lord inviting you into the grace of living within limits?

9:00 a.m. Spiritual rhythms

- The Israelites were taught a rhythm of life by God – a time each day for gathering food – six days of work – one day of rest. There was a pattern/routine to their days and weeks. Later – there was a rhythm to their year – as they had particular days set aside for feasts and sacrifices. God gave them a rhythm of "remembering" his faithfulness.
- We are existing in a time in human history that is characterized as "the bondage of busyness."
- The hard truth is that even busyness in ministry can distract us from being with God. This is why we have devoted this year to pausing each month and checking in with our hearts. We don't want to DO ministry so well that we lose our BEING with Jesus in the process.
- Being busy for God is not the same as having a vibrant spiritual life with God. Therefore, we need regular rhythms of work and rest – stress and recovery – much like that of an athlete.
- Quote on page 127.
- We must avoid "Prayerless striving." This happens as we capture time for silence, prayer and solitude throughout the day. (RHB – enjoys these three rhythms during her daily exercise routine – it's possible to build a rhythm like this into our lives.)

9:15 a.m. SMALL GROUPS – Spiritual rhythms

- What rhythms of spiritual life have worked for you? (Solitude and Community)
- What new rhythms would you like to develop?

9:30 a.m. – LARGE GROUP SHARING

9:45 a.m. – PRACTICAL THINGS

- What are your thoughts about doing a summer study on Proverbs?
- What are your thoughts about discounting River registration to stimulate earlier signups?
- Last gathering is May 4, 8–10 a.m. Celebration and reflection. Potluck breakfast.
- Chapter 13 “Revisioning the Promise Land” – Prepare.

Closing Question and Answer Time.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Assisi, Francis of, Clare of Assisi, and O.F.M John Vaughn. *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works.* Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1982.

Bailey, Sarah Pulliam. "Conservative Leader Bill Gothard Resigned Following Abuse Allegations." *Religion News Service.* March 6, 2014. https://religionnews.com/2014/03/06/conservative-leader-bill-gothard-resigned-following-abuse-allegations/ (accessed July 9, 2021).

—. "Mark Driscoll Charged with Abusive Behavior by Former Mars Hill Pastors." *Religion News Service.* August 22, 2014. https://religionnews.com/2014/08/22/mark-driscoll-charged-allegations-21-former-mars-hill-pastors/ (accessed July 9, 2021).

Barna Group, The. "Many Churchgoers and Faith Leaders Struggle to Define Spiritual Maturity." *Barna.com.* May 11, 2009. https://www.barna.com/research/many-churchgoers-and-faith-leaders-struggle-to-define-spiritual-maturity/ (accessed July 14, 2020).

—. "Year in Review: Barna's Top 10 Releases of 2021." *Barna.com.* December 22, 2021. https://www.barna.com/research/year-in-review-2021/ (accessed December 28, 2021).

Barton, Ruth Haley. *Invitation to Retreat.* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2018.

—. *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation.* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006.

—. *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership.* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2018.

Beasley-Topliffe, Keith, ed. *The Upper Room Dictionary of Christian Spiritual Formation.* Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2003.

Belleville, Linda L., Craig L. Bloomberg, Craig S. Keener, Thomas Schreiner. *Two Views on Women in Ministry.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001.

Biography.com Editors. "Saint Clare of Assisi." *Biography.com.* April 2, 2014. https://www.biography.com/religious-figure/saint-clare-of-assisi (accessed January 1, 2022).

Blalock, Marshall. "President's Perspective: Persevering over Sexual Sin." *BaptistCourier.com.* July 11, 2018. https://baptistcourier.com/2018/07/presidents-perspective-persevering-over-sexual-sin/ (accessed July 13, 2020).

Bradley, Anthony. “American Evangelicalism Isn’t Patrilineal or Feminized, It’s Matrilineal.” *MereOrthodoxy.com.* August 26, 2020. https://mereorthodoxy.com/evangelicals-matrilineal/ (accessed July 10, 2021).

Brame, Grace Adolphsen. *Faith, the Yes of the Heart.* Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1999.

Breshears, Gerry and Mark Driscoll. *Doctrine: What Christians Should Believe.* Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010.

Buchanan, Mark. *The Rest of God: Restoring your Soul by Restoring Sabbath.* Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2006.

Burge, Ryan. “Behind the Steep Deline in Church Attendance Among Women.” *Barna.com.* March 4, 2020. https://www.barna.com/changes-behind-the-scenes/ (accessed August 4, 2020).

Butcher, Carmen Acevedo. *Man of Blessing: A Life of St. Benedict.* Brewster, MA: Paraclete, 2006.

Carretto, Carlo. *I, Francis.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1982.

Carson, D.A. *The Love of God.* Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006.

Carter, Paul. “What Did Jesus Believe About the Bible?” *The Gospel Coalition Canadian Edition.* December 17, 2017. https://ca.thegospelcoalition.org/columns/ad-fontes/jesus-believe-bible/ (accessed December 18, 2018).

Casey, Michael. *Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina.* Liguori, MO: Liguori/Triumph, 1995.

Challies, Tim. “What Can We Learn from Jesus about Evangelism?” *Ligonier.org.* March 18, 2009. https://www.ligonier.org/blog/what-can-we-learn-from-jesus-about-evangelism/ (accessed December 28, 2018).

Chambers, Oswald. *If You Will Ask: Reflections on the Power of Prayer.* Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House, 1937.

Chan, Simon. *Spiritual Theology.* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998.

Christian History Magazine Editorial Staff. *131 Christians Everyone Should Know.* Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2000.

Christianity Today. *The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill Podcast.* 2021.

Conway, Andrew. “5 Reasons You Need the Westminster Shorter Catechism.” *The Gospel Coalition.org.* April 25, 2016. https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/five-reasons-you-need-the-westminster-shorter-catechism (accessed Janiuary 5, 2022).

Cunningham, Lawrence. “St. Francis of Assisi.” *Britannica.com.* September 29, 2020. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Francis-of-Assisi (accessed January 6, 2022).

Dart, John. “Swaggart Steps Down After Public Confession: Evangelist Admits Moral ‘Sin,’ Leaves for Indefinite Period.” *Los Angeles Times*, February 22, 1988.

Evan, Howard. “Three Temptations of Spiritual Formation.” *Christianity Today*, December 9, 2002.

Farrer, Lauralee and Clayton J. Schmit. *Praying the Hours in Ordinary Life.* Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010.

Foster, Richard J. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth.* New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1998.

—. *Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home.* New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1992.

Friedman, Thomas L. *The World Is Flat.* London: Picador, 2007.

Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994.

Harris, Paul. “Ted Haggard, Mega-Church Founder Felled by Sex Scandal, Returns to Pulpit.” *The Guardian*, June 5, 2010.

Hedges, Brian G. *Christ Formed in You.* Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd, 2010.

History.com Editors. “Jim Bakker Is Indicted on Federal Charges.” *History.com.* October 4, 1988. https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/jim-bakker-is-indicted-on-federal-charges (accessed July 9, 2021).

James, Carolyn Custis. *Half the Church: Recapturing God’s Global Vision for Women.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010.

Keller, Timothy. *The Songs of Jesus.* New York, NY: Viking Penguin Random House, 2015.

Kelley, Melissa Morgan. “Christians Are Going Back to Church —But Maybe Not the Same One.” *Christianity Today.com.* January 18, 2022. https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2022/january/church-switch-turnover-leave-covid-pandemic.html (accessed January 23, 2022).

Kruger, Melissa. *Growing Together: Taking Mentoring Beyond Small Talk and Prayer Requests.* Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020.

Kruger, Melissa, Trillia Newbell, Hannah Anderson, Jen Wilkin, et al. *Identity Theft: Reclaiming the Truth of Who We Are in Christ.* Deerfield, IL: The Gospel Coalition, 2018.

Lausanne Theology Working Group. "Following Jesus as the Truth: Postmodernity and Challenges of Relativism." *Lausanne Movement.* February 12, 2007. https://lausanne.org/content/lop/following-jesus-as-the-truth-postmodernity-and-challenges-of-relativism-lop-62-b (accessed July 10, 2021).

Lawrence, Brother. *The Practice of the Presence of God.* Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004.

LifeWay Research. *State of American Theology Study.* White Paper, Ligonier Ministries, 2020.

Lobdell, Stephanie Dyrness. "When You're a Pastor Who Suffers from Depression." *ChristianityToday.com.* December 10, 2017. www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2017/december-web-exclusives/when-youre-pastor-suffers-from-depression.html (accessed December 29, 2018).

Macchia, Stephen A. *Crafting a Rule of Life.* Downers Grove. IL: InterVarsity, 2012.

Mathews, Alice. *Gender Roles and the People of God.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017.

Maxwell, John C. *Equipping 101.* New York, NY: HarperCollins Leadership, 2004.

McGrath, Alister E. *Christian Spirituality.* Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999.

Miller, Paul E. *A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World.* Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2009.

National Public Radio. "What Is a Paradigm Shift, Anyway?" *NPR.org.* July 18, 2016. https://www.npr.org/sections/13.7/2016/07/18/486487713/what-is-a-paradigm-shift-anyway (accessed July 10, 2021).

Noack, Mary Ann. *Mornings with Mary Ann.* March 22, 2020–April 2, 2021. https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCackrGIOqMG-Qv836GVlfVQ.

Norwich, Julian of, and A.C. Spearing. *Revelations of Divine Love.* London: Penguin, 1998.

Nouwen, Henri J. M. *The Way of the Heart.* New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1981.

Nouwen, Henri J. M. *Spiritual Formation: Following the Movements of the Spirit.* New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2010.

Nursia, St. Benedict of, and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove. *The Rule of Saint Benedict.* Brewster, MA: Paraclete, 2012.

Peace, Richard. *Spiritual Journaling, Recording Your Journey Toward God.* Colorado Springs, CO: Tyndale House, 1998.

Peppiatt, Lucy. *The Disciple: On Becoming Truly Human.* Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012.

—. *Unveiling Paul's Women: Making Sense of 1 Corinthians 11:2–16.* Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018.

Peterson, Eugene H. *Answering God: The Psalms as Tools for Prayer.* New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1989.

—. *Eat This Book.* Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2006.

Peterson, Eugene. *Tell It Slant.* Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008.

Piper, John. "The Son of Man Came to Serve." *DesiringGod.org.* December 17, 1995. www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-son-of-man-came-to-serve (accessed December 28, 2018).

Pummerer, Lotte, Robert Böhm, Lau Lilleholt, et al. "Conspiracy Theories and Their Societal Effects During the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Sage Journals*, March 2021.

Radmacher, Dr. Earl D. "Women's Ministry Roles and Ordination." Presentation, Portland, OR: Conservative Baptist Seminaries, 2004.

River West Church. *River West Church.* n.d. www.riverwest.org/theriver (accessed August 4, 2020).

Robinson, Bill. *Incarnate Leadership: 5 Leadership Lessons from the Life of Jesus.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009.

Sanders, J. Oswald. *Spiritual Leadership.* Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1967.

Scazzero, Peter. *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014.

Shellnutt, Kate, Silliman,Daniel. "Ravi Zacharias Investigation of Sexual Abuse." *Christianity Today.com.* February 11, 2021. https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2021/february/ravi-zacharias-rzim-investigation-sexual-abuse-sexting-rape.html (accessed January 27, 2022).

Sienna, Catherine of, Suzanne Noffke and Giuliana Cavallini. *Catherine of Siena: The Dialogue.* Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1980.

Sleeth, Matthew. *24/6.* Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2012.

Smietana, Bob. "Bill Hybels Resigns from Willow Creek." *Christianity Today.com.* April 10, 2018. https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2018/april/bill-hybels-resigns-willow-creek-misconduct-allegations.html (accessed December 28, 2018).

Stedman, Ray C. *Body Life: The Church Comes Alive.* Glendale, CA: Regal Books, 1972.

Stetzer, Ed. "The Epidemic of Bible Illiteracy in Our Churches." *ChristianityToday.com.* July 6, 2015. www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2015/july/epidemic-of-bible-in-our-churches.html (accessed December 29, 2018).

Taylor, Justin. "An FAQ on Mysticism and the Christian Life." *The Gospel Coalition.org.* October 30, 2015. https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/an-faq-on-mysticism-and-the-christian-life/ (accessed December 30, 2021).

—. "Tim Keller on the Church Crisis that He Never Had to Face as a Pastor but You Do." *The Gospel Coalition Blogs.* January 4, 2022. https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/tim-keller-on-the-church-crisis-that-he-never-had-to-face-as-a-pastor-but-you-do (accessed January 6, 2022).

The Oregonian. "Oregon's First Coronavirus Patient —Lake Oswego School Custodian." May 5, 2020. https://www.oregonlive.com/coronavirus/2020/05/oregons-first-coronavirus-patient-lake-oswego-school-custodian-released-from-hospital-after-2-months.html (accessed October 27, 2020).

Thomas, Gary. *Sacred Pathways: Discover Your Soul's Path to God.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996.

Tripp, Paul David. *Lead: 12 Gospel Principles for Leadership in the Church.* Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020.

Ugolino, Brother. *The Little Flowers of St. Francis of Assisi.* New York, NY: The Heritage Press, 1958.

Villodas, Rich. *The Deeply Formed Life.* Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook, 2020.

Webb, Chris. *The Fire of the Word: Meeting God on Holy Ground.* Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2011.

Whitney, Donald S. *Spiritual Disciplines For The Christian Life.* Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991.

Willard, Dallas. *Renovation of the Heart.* Colorado Springs, CO: Tyndale House, 2002.

World Population Review.com. *Least Religious States 2021*. https://worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/least-religious-states (accessed July 10, 2021).

VITA

Mary Ann Owenhouse Noack was born in Berkeley, California. She studied business at Montana State University where she received a Bachelor of Science degree in Marketing Management (1982). Later she attended Western Seminary and received a master's degree in Biblical and Theological Studies (2016). She began studying Spiritual Formation at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in 2018 and completed her D. Min. degree in 2022. Mary Ann has served as a Bible Teacher with Bible Study Fellowship and is currently the Women's Pastor at River West Church. She also teaches a Women in Leadership Course at Western Seminary in Portland, OR.